IS Volume1

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 1

Okiura

弓弦イズル
IzuruYumizuru
InfiniteStratos
IS
インフィニット・ストラトス

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IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉

弓弦イズル

MEDIA FACTORY

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メディアファクトリー
MEDIA FACTORY

IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉

女性にしか反応しない兵器「インフィニット・ストラトス」(IS)の操縦者を育成するための学校・IS学園。そこでは世界各国から集められた少女たちが候補生としての勉強に日々励んでいる—はずなのだが、男なのになぜかISを起動させることができた織斑一夏は、この学校に強制入学させられてしまう。当然、彼の周囲には女の子ばかり。「世界で唯一ISを使える男」である一夏に、彼女たちは興味津々！　幼なじみの篠ノ之箒をはじめとしたクラスメイト(少女限定)に囲まれた、一夏の波瀾万丈のスクールライフが始まる!?　期待の新鋭が贈る、学園疾走アクションラブコメディ！

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弓弦イズルの本

IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉［イラスト：okiura］

弓弦イズル（ゆみづる・いずる）

1982年富山県生まれ。

ＰＣゲーム会社に5年3ヶ月勤務ののちフリーとして独立。

この名義では今作が初の商業作品。

Illustration

◎okiura（おきうら）

新進気鋭のイラストレーター。普段は擬人化メカ少女や魔法少女ものを好んでよく描く。

『白銀のローレシアン』（一迅社文庫）の挿絵を担当。

また、マクロスA（エース）にて「ノシ」名義で「マクロスF ～しーくれっとびじょんず～」を連載中。

カバーイラスト／okiura　装丁／伸童舎

MF文庫J

IS
〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉

弓弦イズル

「い、い、いちか……？」

今シャワー室から出てきたのは
幼なじみだった。

「さあ、踊りなさい。
わたくし、セシリア・オルコットと
ブルー・ティアーズの奏でる円舞曲で！」

セシリア・オルコット

イギリス代表候補生。
専用IS【ブルー・ティアーズ】。

篠ノ之箒（しののほうき）

6年ぶりに再会した幼なじみ。
専用ISなし。

織斑一夏（おりむらいちか）

「世界で唯一ＩＳを動かせる男子」。
専用IS【白式】。

凰鈴音（ファン・リンイン）

中国代表候補生。
専用IS【甲龍】。

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IS
〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉

弓弦イズル

MF文庫
J

CHOCO

1
INFINITE
STRATOS
インフィニット・
ストラトス
弓弦イズル
YUMIZURU Izuru
Illustration: CHOCO
OVERLAP

IS

INFINITE STRATOS 1

インフィニット・ストラトス 1

弓弦イズル
YUMIZURU Izuru

Illustration: CHOCO

「い、い、いちか……？」

シャワー室から出てきたのは、
今日再会を果たした幼なじみだった。

「さあ、踊りなさい。

わたくし、セシリア・オルコットと
ブルー・ティアーズの奏でる円舞曲（ワルツ）で！」

ブルー・ティアーズ

イギリスが開発した第三世代型ISの最新鋭機であり、新技術BT兵器＝『操縦者のイメージを反映、具現化することで、本来複雑な独立可動ユニットを操る』ことを目的とした兵器、通称『ビット』を試験的に搭載している
ビットは子機という意味の他に『Bluetears Innovation Trial』（ブルー・ティアーズ革新型試作機）の頭文字を取って『BIT』という意味も含む。

肩部ユニットにはレーザービット四基（BT I～IV号機）とミサイルビット二基（BT V～VI号機）を搭載。レーザービット二基とミサイルビット一機が合体した複合ビットを左右に位置させている。
各BT兵器と各部スラスター部にはクリスタル状の自律稼働用大型コンデンサが搭載されており一見して判る外見上の大きな特徴となっている。

和名：蒼雫（そうてき）
型式：BT-01
世代：第三世代
国家：イギリス
分類：遠距離射撃型
装備：BTエネルギーライフル『スターライトmk-III』
近接ショートブレード『インターセプター』
BT兵器『ブルー・ティアーズ』（レーザービット4/ミサイルビット2）
装甲：BT同調型サード・グリッド装甲II（試験運用モデル）
仕様：マインド・インタフェース兵器『ブルー・ティアーズ』（通称・BT兵器）

甲龍

SHENLONG

第三世代型IS開発において他国に差をつけるため、『実用性と効率化』を主眼に開発された本機は、現時点ですでに高いスペックを有している。

空間圧作用兵器とは、PICの応用によって実用化された兵器であり、一種の重力操作装置を使用している。衝撃砲はこの空間圧によって空中に砲身を作り出し、その反作用で砲身内に溜まった衝撃を放出する兵器である。砲身はもちろん、砲弾も透明であり、基本的には不可視。

衝撃砲はその出力をコントロールすることが可能で、高出力のものは単発仕様であるが、出力を下げることでマシンガンのように連射することも可能である。ただし、射程距離はそれほど長くないため、ブルー・ティアーズのような遠距離射撃型とは相性が悪い。

和名：甲龍（こうりゅう）
型式：甲装・牙【参】
世代：第三世代
国家：中国
分類：近・中距離両用型
装備：大型ブレード『双天牙月（そうてんがげつ）』x2（連結可能）
　　肩部大型衝撃砲『龍咆（りゅうほう）』x2
　　腕部小型衝撃砲『崩拳（ほうけん）』x2
装甲：硬度可変型ヘヴィー・イグニス装甲
仕様：空間圧作用兵器『衝撃砲』

Ichika ORIMURA Right

Left Houki SHINONONO

IS
INFINITE STRATOS 1

インフィニット・ストラトス1

弓弦イズル
YUMIZURU Izuru

Illustration: CHOCO

3 第一話 クラスメイトは全員女

61 第二話 クラス代表決定戦！

130 第三話 転校生はセカンド幼なじみ

193 第四話 決戦！ クラス対抗戦（リーグマッチ）

織斑一夏 おりむら・いちか

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篠ノ之箒 しののの・ほうき

6年ぶりに再会した幼なじみ。
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イギリス代表候補生
専用IS【ブルー・ティアーズ】

Cecilia ALCOTT

凰鈴音 ファン・リンイン

中国代表候補生
専用IS【甲龍】

Lingyin HUANG

立入禁止
立入禁止
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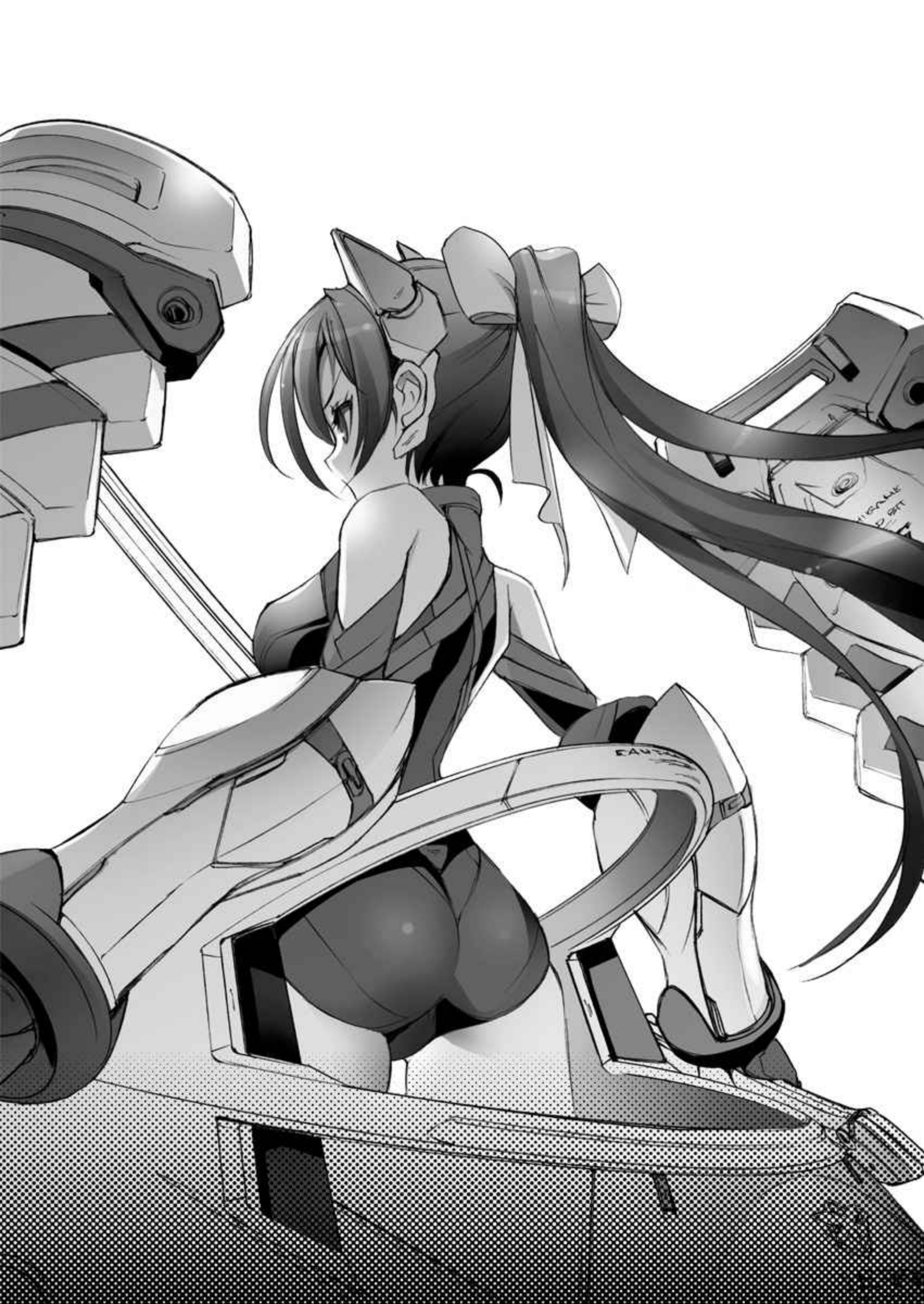
1年1組
UNLOCK
TOUCH TO OPEN



SHENLONG
RIGHT ARM

件名	日付
【祝】第1巻発売！	：2013/ 早春
□ラフ □クリンナップ ■あとがき	時刻 ：標準時刻電波が受信出来ません。

CHOCO
MUGITANI KOICHI
chocolateshop@mac.com
http://chocolateshop-float.com

放っておくと慎ましやかな胸の萌芽ばかりを描く僕にイラストのお仕事をご依頼戴きましてありがとうございます弓弦先生。
大きいお肉を描くとライフポイントが削れていく僕がこんなにいっぱいおっぱいを描くことが出来るようになりました。
これもひとえに弓弦先生のお…
え？まだ足りないですか？！
大丈夫です。
箒も成長期ですから巻を追う毎にふくらみます！（ライフと引き替えに…）

CHOCO

Chapter 1: All my Classmates are Female

"Everyone's here, right? Then let's start the SHR (student homeroom meeting)--"

The vice homeroom teacher, Yamada Maya-sensei, who introduced herself before, stood in front of the blackboard as she earnestly smiled at everyone.

She has a petite figure, and doesn't look any different than a student. However, wearing clothes that didn't quite match her body made her look even more petite. And it looked ever more out of place with her large olive green eyes, behind her hazy glasses.

How should I say it? Instead of saying that it was a disproportionate sense of 'a kid wearing adult clothes'...it was more like a kid being forced into adult clothes and it seemed that I wasn't the only one thinking like this.

"Then everyone, let's get along with each other over the next year~"

"....."

However, the classroom was filled with an awkward mood, nobody reacted.

"Now, let's move on to self-introductions. Mm, we'll go by seating arrangements."

Even though I thought that the vice homeroom teacher was a little cute when she panicked, that didn't stir me with a 'I feel that I've got to do something' kind of state of mind, because unfortunately, I had no time for that.

If you want to know why,

The reason is simple: excluding me, everyone in the class is a girl.

Today is the high school entrance ceremony, and for the first day, a new world opened up. That itself was good, something worth being happy about.

However, the primary problem is that I'm the only boy .

(This... is a lot more serious than I thought...)

It wasn't just me over-thinking it, but in fact, I really could feel the gazes of all the girls in my class.

Besides, my seat isn't preferable. Why was I placed right in the front middle row of the class? My extremely unmistakeable upper body continued to be noticed even though I didn't want it to.

My eyes turned toward the windows.

"..."

Though I sent a pleading look, the sad thing is that my childhood friend, Shinonono Houki turned her head away irritably, pretending to look outside. Such a cold reaction. Is this the attitude that a childhood friend should show after being separated for 6 years? No... Does she completely hate me now?

"...san, Orimura Ichika-San."

"Ye-yes!?"

Suddenly having my name called out, I subconsciously responded. As expected, there were snickers, and it was difficult to stay calm.

Even though it's not like I'm bad at handling girls, there's always a limit. It's similar to liking ramen and

letting it be the main course, I'd get sick of it in less than 3 days. Sigh, I don't know. Besides, I never liked ramen to that extent...eh, I shouldn't be thinking about that now.

Anyway, I'm the only boy in the class, there are 29 other female students in this class, and the assistant homeroom teacher is a female as well. As for the homeroom teacher...I don't know, but he or she is likely to be a female as well. It seems that she hasn't arrived yet . What is she doing now?

"W-well, I'm sorry for calling you out so loudly. Did I startle you? Sorry-sorry! But, the self-introductions... we started from 'あ' (a) , and now we're at ' (o)' for Orimura-san now. So, pl-please, could you introduce yourself? Co-could you?"

The vice homeroom teacher, Yamada Maya-sensei, bowed politely. However, the bowing caused her spectacles to slide forward. And her air of 'anything goes' really worried me. Speaking of which, is she really older than me? If it was said that she's as old as me, I could believe that.

"No, there's no need to apologize... besides, it's just a self-introduction, so please calm down, sensei."

"Re-really? Really? Really? Yo-You said it, so you better do it properly, okay?!"

Yamada-sensei suddenly looked up and grabbed my hand, and held it really tightly... well, it seems I just attracted quite a bit of attention again.

However, since I said it, as a man, I can't get out of it. And the most important thing is that once I form a crack here, I have to face this awkward environment again (TN : Most likely, human interaction).

I stood up and turned to face the class.

Uu...

At first, I just thought that I sensed them staring at my back, but now I could definitely feel their gazes piercing through me from the front. Anyway, even Houki, who had abandoned me, glanced over. As expected, even I, who is self-admittedly rather capable of handling girls, am fearful. Even if I like curry—no, I must stay focused.

"Hm-... Well, I'm Orimura Ichika. I'll be in your care."

After I bowed courteously—wait a second? The expressions on my classmates' faces seemed to generate a

weird feeling, almost as if they were thinking, 'say something more' and 'it can't be just this, right?'.

It's impossible for me to rattle on about myself. It's not that I'm uninteresting, but I don't want everyone to hear it. Besides, isn't it more troublesome to talk about ones' interests right from the beginning? I'll scare them if I suddenly talk about 'planting and grafting cacti!', right? On a side note, I'm not actually interested in planting and grafting cacti. I just thought I'd mention it as a word of caution.

"..."

I could feel the sweat trickling down my back. What should I do? What should I say?

Speaking of which, why am I here?

--

"Uu—so cold..."

In the middle of February, I, as a third-year, was heading towards the examination center.

"If I only want to get into the high school nearest my house, why must I go to a place that's four stops away from it...and today is so cold..."

Due to a cheating case last year, the government would only divulge the location of each school's entrance exams 2 days before the actual examination took place. Though I felt that it was completely excessive, as you can imagine. I was only a third-year at the time. Besides, what could I say? Basically, I could only think about my bitterness as I grudgingly headed towards the examination center.

My ideal school was the Aoetsu Private School that was situated near my house, a school that was an average standard in education, and also had a school festival.

If there's any special advantage that's worth mentioning, it is that the private school's fees are extremely inexpensive. Exceptionally inexpensive.

Why? That's simple. This is because 90% of all the graduates of this school are employed in jobs related to this school's corporation.

Even if it wasn't like the employment freeze, it's something worth being happy about when you can be taken care of right after your graduation.

And there are so many wonderful jobs out there, and besides, they're all localized. There's no need to worry about flying to a different rural place every other day. Really quite wonderful.

"And in the end, I still want to get away from Chifuyu-nee's care..."

As for my house, a few things happened. My parents are no longer around, and though my older sister, who's a lot older than me, has taken care of me for quite a while , I've always felt inferior to others for having no parents.

Tough, even though we are not destitute since Chifuyu-nee's earnings are good, I'd still feel bad if I continue to be a burden to her.

At first, I thought of working immediately after graduating from middle school, but due to my big sister's overwhelming strength -—- or we could say *gentle* persuasion -—— I couldn't overcome them, so until then, I was still an examinee.

However, getting into Aoetsu Private School was like finding a job. At the same time, I could reduce the burden I've placed on Chifuyu-nee. But, it wasn't really about reducing the burden I placed on her,... it's just that I wanted to do it.

"...Let's just say that I accept what happened before."

Thanks to a year of cramming, I was designated a grade A student. As usual, I went about taking exams, and as usual, I was accepted as per normal, so I wasn't nervous when I walked into the examinations area. Though I knew the name of the examination facility, I didn't exactly know the location, and such a common public facility has many functions. Though it is rare for a private firm to borrow from the public sector, those are all regional enterprises, and many obey it exclusively.

"Hm... Weird, now how do I get to the second floor?"

Not good, I'm lost. Speaking of which, why must this facility be constructed in such a confusing manner? Seems like it was constructed by some designer with a rather good background. Also, that person should be born from some localized industry.

"But what's with this 'I'm too fancy to design this with some semblance of order', feeling about the place ... and, where are the stairs?... " Seriously, to call this place a maze would be an understatement. It's difficult to understand why there aren't any maps on the walls. Glass tiles on the walls in the corridor lowers air conditioning efficiency, right? And wouldn't it be dangerous to set up tiles on those walls if there's an earthquake and thus render them pointless? Wouldn't those lights that are positioned beside one another use quite a lot of electricity? Besides, wouldn't changing them be extremely difficult? Why is the roof so pointlessly high? Hm...

"..."

A third year already and yet I was lost—no, this is just too embarrassing.

"Never mind, I'll open the next door I see. It'll probably be the right one."

Ah, it's so nice to have a door over here. Shall I open it ?

"Ah—you are an examinee, correct? Alright, head over to the opposite side and change. We're in a rush here. We can only borrow it up till 4 o'clock, and we can't have any extensions. Really, I don't know what the government is thinking here..."

The moment I walked in, a 30-something, psychotic looking female teacher started to rattle on. However, she really looked busy, or maybe because she was busy or because she lacked judgment —or both—, she gave me step-by-step instructions without even looking at me before she walked away.

(Change clothes? Hm, do we have to change clothes during an exam nowadays? Ahh, the things they think up to handle cheating, no matter which school it is.)

Once I pulled aside the curtain, I found something mysterious behind it.

How should I put it? It was something like a 'medieval armor placed inside a castle'. Also, it was kneeling down on one leg, as if it was swearing loyalty to its master.

In stark contrast to medieval armor, only minor parts were well protected, and probably no one would find

such protection acceptable. Anyway, putting that thing over there would make anyone wonder 'what the heck is going on'.

It has the shape of a human, almost as if it were silently waiting for its user to arrive.

—I know what this is, it's an 'IS'.

The actual name is 'Infinite Stratos'. It was originally created as a multipurpose power suit for space operations.

However, its development did not go as the creator had originally intended, but ended up being modified by the other mechanic specialists involved, into a 'war machine'. However, all the other countries designated it as a 'Sport' —a so called high performance— flying device.

The fatal flaw of the 'IS' is that this machine will only react to females.

Thus, right now, the thing in front of me was like a dummy in a windowed cupboard. It didn't do anything, nor will it do anything. It's just an object.

—Thinking about this, I touched it.

"Hm!?"

Ting! A sound of metal echoed in my mind.

Next, all sorts of information appeared in my consciousness. In just a few seconds, all the things that one wants to know yet is unable to know appeared in front of me. The basic movements of the 'IS', operation method, capabilities, characteristics, existing equipment, active time limit, movement range, sensitivity, radar search, armor residue, output gauge, and so on...

As if I had used it for years, as if it was a technique that I refined, I understood everything about it, and mastered it.

The vision was also linked to the sensors, the numbers directly appearing in my mind. I could also feel the information of my surroundings through numbers.

"What, what's going on...?"

It moved. The 'IS'. Like my own hands and feet.

I felt something expanding over my skin-mucosal armor extended... over.

My body suddenly felt light, and I felt as if I were floating—jets operation normal... confirmed.

While my right hand felt increasingly heavy, a weapon started to form out of light, a close-range combat knife... extend.

I felt chilly about this sudden increase in knowledge of the world, ultra-aware components in the most comfortable way... complete.

I understood everything about what it does. Despite not having known it, despite not having ever learned about it, I understood.

And the world that I saw through the data of the 'IS' was like—

--

"..."

—Hm~

Let's confirm the situation again. Today's officially my first day in High School, and I'm currently doing a self-introduction. In front of me are 29 girls, and behind me, it seems like Yamada-sensei is about to cry...oh yeah, Yamada-sensei's name is easy to remember. From up to down, it can be read as 'Ya Ma Da Ma Ya' (ヤ). Hm, nice name, it's easy to remember. Anyway, enough small talk.

And yet, my self-introduction hasn't ended. The girls are giving me looks of 'tell us more about yourself!'.

Hey, Houki, aren't you going to give me a hand as a childhood friend?—Ah, she's ignoring me again? So heartless. How about that touching reunion scene again? Even though it never happened.

(Not good. This is bad. If I remain silent like this, I'll end up being branded a 'sinister individual'.)

I held my breath before inhaling deeply, looking determined as I said,

"That's all."

DANG~! Several girls collapsed onto the floor. What were they expecting from me? Stop spouting nonsense.

"That, that..."

Behind me, I could hear a voice crying. Eh? This won't do?

PANG! I got knocked on the back of my head.

"OW—!?"

It hurt, but compared to this, something even more important flashed through my head.

This way of hitting — with suitable force, perfect angle , acceptable speed, someone — though it's extremely similar to someone else's method that I'm familiar with, but...

"..."

I gingerly turned around. Black tight fitting skirt, tall and slim, the body line of someone who doesn't look muscular even after lots of training. Her hands folded in

front of her chest, her sharp slim phoenix eyes would remind anyone of wolves.

"Eh, Guan Yu!?"

PANG! There goes another hit. The impact was quite hard, well, look, all the girls are staring.

"Who's a hero in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms? Idiot?"

A deep voice. Though I have heard the sound effect of a gong, but, eh?

—No, wait, hold on hold on hold on. Why is Chifuyu-nee here? That sister of mine whose job I don't even know about, my own sister who couldn't even make it back home once or twice per month.

"Ah, Orimura-sensei, is the meeting over?"

—This little argument would only end badly. In the end, our connection as siblings was revealed.

"Ah, Yamada-sensei. It's been tough on you, forcing you to make them introduce themselves."

Oh, I've never heard her use such a gentle tone before. Where did Guan Yun Chang go? Did he ride the Red Hare Horse away and change into Liu Bei?

"No, it's nothing. As the assistant homeroom teacher, if I can't even do that..."

The crying disappeared, as vice homeroom teacher Yamada-sensei responded to Chifuyu-nee with such an energetic voice and an attentive look. Ah, she's actually embarrassed.

"Everyone, my name is Orimura Chifuyu, and my duty is that for this one year, I'll be training you in the operations and controls of IS. Everything I teach, you have to remember, and understand. To those who can't understand, I'll teach them till they can. My job is to thoroughly train you during your first year, from the age of 15 to 16. You can dislike my attitude, but you still have to do what I say. Understood?"

What's with this declaration of war? No mistake... this is my older sister, Orimura Chifuyu.

But there weren't any awkward cries, but shrieks,

"KYAAA—! It's Chifuyu-sama, it's the real Chifuyu-sama herself!"

"I've always been your fan!"

"I came to this school from North Kyuushuu because I admired you, onee-sama!"

"I came all the way from southern Hokkaido!"

"I'm so happy to be taught by Chifuyu-sama!"

"I'll gladly die for Chifuyu-sama!"

Chifuyu-nee stared at the chattering girls with a disheartened expression.

"...it's really quite a sight to see so many idiots gather here every year. What a surprise? Or is there a special reason? Are these fools only here to attend my class?"

It's not an act, Chifuyu-nee really is disappointed. Chifuyu-nee, popularity can't be bought you know? How about you be a bit gentler?

I was too naive in thinking this, as sweet as the sweet wine of the Misaka Shrine (that's just sugar water), as sweet as the Gotanda Canteen's pumpkin. Maybe not Tianjin's sweet chestnuts—sweet but not to the extent that I can write something about it, or something like that .

"KYAAAHH! ONEE-SAMA! SCOLD US MORE! CONTINUE TO SCOLD US MORE!!"

"BUT BE GENTLE TO US FROM TIME TO TIME!"

"AND BE EXTREMELY ELEGANT AFTERWARDS~!"

At least my classmates are good at being energetic.

However, I was rather shocked and confused at my homeroom teacher being Chifuyu-nee -- that shouldn't be the case, but I managed to calm down due to all of the girls' shouting. Of course, when there's such turmoil right next to you, one will consciously calm down, or something like that. I've experienced such things before.

"Oi, so you failed at making even a simple greeting?"

Extremely sarcastic, extreme sarcasm — is this the meaning of being strict? My own elder sister who takes care of me, she's just that kind of a person.

"No, Chifuyu-nee, I—"

PANG! That's the third time this has happened today, got that, Chifuyu-nee? 5000 brain cells die every time my head's hit.

"Call me Orimura-sensei."

"...Yes, Orimura-sensei."

"Eh...? Then, it means that Orimura-kun is Chifuyu-sama's younger brother...?"

"Maybe that has something to do with him being the only guy in the world that can use the IS?"

"Ah~ Great. I really wanted to switch him over."

I'll ignore those words for now. Let's move forward.

I came here to this public IS Academy as the only male in the world who can pilot the 'IS'.

The IS Academy is, as its name suggested, an educational corporation meant to nurture IS operators. The Japanese government sees it as a principle duty to fund it and run it. However, the results of the research are revealed to the entire world due to the common agreement, and at the same time, Japan has no right to either remain silent or hide them. No matter what happens in this school, the Japanese government has to intervene fairly, and has the obligation of settling these matters under the premise that all the countries in the treaty have agreed upon. Also, the school has opened its doors to foreign students without any conditions, and the

Japanese government is to provide protection—as accorded to the contents of the IS treaty regarding IS pilot training agencies.

This is the school's code of discipline.

Basically, it's like 'damned Japan, creating the IS and causing chaos in the world, the very least you could do build a school to train individuals in this area of expertise . And hand over your research and technology. Ah, and you will be bearing all the financing costs'. A certain country A is really a rogue.

(Why am I at this school? ...Well, because I activated a test IS in an IS examination arena, but speaking of which, how did I end up getting in there?...)

—Are Aoetsu Gakuen and the IS Academy similar? Anyway, that seemed to be the case.

"..."

Suddenly, in this extremely excited classroom, I felt a stare.

Looking back, Houki, who was just now looking outside the classroom, turned around to stare at me.

(Hm—, though she doesn't look angry... did I do something?)

Never mind, I'll ask her later.

Just as I was thinking about it, the bell rang.

"Oh my, SHR is over. Everyone, I'll have you memorize the basics of IS within the next 6 months. After that, it's practicals, you must let the basic maneuvers sink in as a part of your body's instincts within half a month. Okay? If you understand, answer me. Whether acceptable or otherwise, respond to whatever I announce ."

Oh, a demon trainer from Hell. Right now, Chifuyu-nee could be a demon in a human skin. No, I would still be able to handle it if it was a demon, because they aren't human. And yet this person in front of me seemed to acknowledge only half of the human functions , how inconsiderate.

Either way, this Orimura Chifuyu was the first generation IS pilot that represented Japan, and was undefeated in an actual match. However, one day, she announced her retirement and disappeared... which must

mean that she came here to teach... she should have at least told me as a family member... I was an idiot for worrying about her.

"SIT DOWN, YOU FOOL!"

Yes, yes ... I'm an idiot.

"Aahh-..."

I can't bear it. It's too much work. I can't. I'm desperate.

"....."

The first theory class for IS is finally finished, and it is now break. But, I didn't know how to react to the abnormal aura within the classroom.

Incidentally, while the IS institute is a profit-earning business, there is also education about IS, that make up the daily courses. The structure of the school? You can look at the map by yourself.

(But, I couldn't make it out one way or another...)

Apart from me, everyone here is a girl. Not only my class, but everyone in the school.

Incidentally, the news that 'I'm the only male able to pilot an IS' has also spread throughout the world, everyone knows about me, from the people of the school to the students.

Which is why, in the middle of the corridor there are girls from the other classes, as well as 2nd and 3rd year senpais. Even though I'm used to seeing girls, but in this case, almost no one has approached me to talk. It seems that, from their expressions, schoolgirls of the same year are thinking 'come talk to me'. The air filled with 'Hey, are you running away from your problems', kind of tension bearing aura.

By the way, even though the IS Academy is the world's only specialized IS school, a lot of schools with

the intention of stimulating their students, enter them in the IS study program, so they can take advanced studies.

And these types of schools are 100% all-female. However, in the end, the girls from such schools have almost no immunity against males, and as for the boys in a normal society, there's a dilemma about their status.

The current weapons are waste metal in front of an IS, that's why the balance of the world's military has been broken. And because IS was invented by the Japanese, Japan had monopolized the IS technology. The other countries that had become more aware of the threat signed an IS Application Protocol—commonly called the 'Alaska Treaty', and had authorized the disclosure of the IS's technology and sharing of information, establishing a foundation of world research institutions, and prohibiting military usage, among other things.

That is why, the number of IS pilots in a country has a very close relationship with its military force (a credible defense force). Only girls can be pilots, so all the involved countries created a prioritized female protection program.

That's why, because the ideology that 'woman = great' was accepted, in but the last ten years women had become considered superior to men.

When suddenly an equal 'man' had appeared, it was obvious that there would be curiosity first.

(After that, we arrive at our present predicament.)

By chance I looked over at the girl sitting in the next desk, and though she was staring at me before, she immediately looked away in a panic. It created a feeling of anxiety of 'being approached'.

Also, becoming the object of the entire country's girls' admiration, along with being titled Orimura Chifuyu's little brother seemed to make things very complicated.

(Who could lend me a hand in this kind of situation...)

Suddenly, I thought about my old friend Gotanda Dan . That guy always said that he envied me, where is he now? It still isn't too late to switch places with me.

"...Excuse me for a moment."

"Eh?"

Suddenly, someone talking to me. Seemed like there's a winner among the girls who were trying to duke it out? ...No, from the almost silent conversations that were carried out inside and outside of the classroom, there's only one girl who would do so.

"...Excuse me"

"..."

In front of my eyes stood the childhood friend whom I last saw six years ago.

Shinonono Houki. We learned kendo together in the same dojo. Her hairstyle was still in the ponytail I remembered. Her more than shoulder-length hair was tied together with a single white ribbon (Shinonono dojo is a half-shrine).

Even though her height is the average for girls of her age, an effect of her practising kendo over these long years is that she has acquired a slender shape. According to her, she was born with her scowl. ... no, even the possibility of being hated by her isn't zero. Actually, when she called my name, it wasn't just my imagination that she was angry.

My impression of Houki, is someone that reminds you of a katana, which has in these six years grown ever sharper.

"Is it OK if we talk in the corridor?"

It's probably hard to talk in the classroom. Forget it, if it can pull me out of this current uncomfortable situation, nothing else matters. It's really a childhood friend who lends a hand. Not fickle. Wanting to apologize to me for what she said before. Ah, me.

"Quickly."

"I-I know."

Houki hurried to the corridor, and the girls gathered there stepped away in the blink of an eye. Like Moses parting the sea.

Even though I came out to the corridor, Houki and I were surrounded by others four meters in diameter. Also , I kinda have the feeling that everyone is eavesdropping. The classroom was also silent.

"By the way..."

"What?"

I just thought about it, so I initiated the conversation. Say Houki, you asked me to come but you're not saying anything, is it too late?

"Last year, you won the world kendo championship, right? Congratulations."

"..."

After Houki heard me say that, her mouth immediately became the shape of a 'へ', and her cheeks turned red. ...Huh? Why is she angry? I was obviously congratulating her.

"Why do you know that?"

"Why, because I saw it in the newspaper..."

"Why, why did you see it in something like a newspaper."

What are you getting at, Houki? I don't understand. It's obvious that one reads newspapers, when they like them. Also, even though I haven't heard you speak for a long time, you haven't changed a bit, still talking like a man, like a warrior.

"Ah--also."

"Wh-what?"

"..."

"Ah, no..."

Finally I noticed the hostile attitude, Houki becoming uneasy, and now inconceivably excited. Unbelievable girl .

"It's been a long time since we have seen each other. Even though it's been six years, I still recognized you immediately."

"Eh..."

"You see, the same hairstyle." I pointed at my own head while saying this, and Houki immediately started playing with her ponytail.

"At-at least you still remember."

"That, I can't forget that, since we are childhood friends. "

"..."

A fierce gleam flashes. I'm still being glared at. Huh-, why?

Ding--Dong--Dang--Dong.

Aye, time has already passed. The bell announcing the second period rings, and the bunch that had encircled Houki and me consequently dispersed. They spread like wildfire. Hmm... no wonder they're IS pilots, their actions are swift.

"Let's return to the classroom too."

"I-I know."

Houki immediately showed an unhappy face, and hurried back in the same manner she came. It seems that this childhood friend of mine has no intention of waiting for me. Six years and she has already become like this? - No, that's not it. Houki was like this from the very beginning.

Resolute in following through her decisions, improving herself steadily day by day, engaging in training daily, stubborn and unyielding. Shinonono Houki is a girl who is more befitting of these descriptions than any guy. She hasn't changed since elementary school.

"..."

She was still staring at me fiercely. That's not good, did she read my mind? Houki has, since childhood, always seemed to become especially acute to when someone has spoken ill of her. -No, I'm not speaking ill of you. It's entirely my wish.

Bang!

"Why aren't you sitting already, Orimura."

"I'm very grateful to be under your guidance, Orimura-sensei."

It's only morning, and twenty thousand of my brain cells have already died.

"...Thus, the basic operations of IS have to be guided by the country. If no permission is granted, we have to pursue criminal responsibilities..."

Yamada-sensei continued with her lesson ever so eloquently. However, I didn't understand anything at all.

"..."

Five heavy books were sitting in front of me. Just flipping to the top most page, I could only see columns and columns of meaningless text. .

(Er, is it only me? Am I the only one who doesn't understand what's going on? Do the rest know? This active whatever offsets that wide-area something, what does it mean? Does it mean that I have to memorize everything...?)

I took a peek at the girl on the next table, and could only see her listening to Yamada-sensei's words, nodding away and jotting down notes from time to time.

(Ku... don't tell me those rumors about IS students studying before they enrolled are true...)

IS pilots have a direct link with our national security strength, so in a certain sense, this school exists to groom

the elites. Also, these are scholars who managed to ace exams several times tougher than regular entrance exams .

(Though I'm not too interested in being an elite... hm-, can't let this continue. Anyway, got to study.)

Feeling somewhat inferior, I lowered my head, and unknowingly, I peeked over at the girl who was jotting down notes.

"Is-, is there something wrong?"

As expected, after the girl noticed me looking at her, she expressed surprise and nervousness, showing a forced smile that conveyed a certain kind of expectation.

"Ah, no, it's nothing. Sorry."

"Is-, is that so?"

After hearing that, the girl showed me a look of relief and disappointment, before returning back to working in her notebook...hm~ did I do something to upset her?

"Is there something you don't understand, Orimura-kun?"

Yamada-sensei noticed me talking to the girl besides me, and thus specifically asked me.

"Ah, that..."

I again looked back at the textbooks —mm, I don't understand anything at all.

"If you have any questions, please ask me. I'm a teacher after all."

Yamada-sensei lifts her chest up and answers confidently. Oh, maybe she really is reliable. Alright, I'll give it a go.

"Yamada-sensei!"

"Yes, Orimura-kun?"

An answer that's full of enthusiasm. Seems like this will work, as expected of a teacher.

"I don't understand anything at all."

I honestly blurted out my shortcoming. When I do this, usually, others tend to empathize with me.

"Erm...ev, everything...?"

Yamada-sensei looked extremely bothered wearing a completely stiff expression...that's weird? Where did that reliable teacher go?

"Th-Then...except for Orimura-san, is there anybody else who doesn't understand the current lesson up till this point?"

Yamada-sensei raised her hand to prompt the class.

Silence...

Strange, that's too strange. Nobody raised their hand. If they only understood half of it to begin with, they'll definitely regret it in the future. Is that alright, is that really alright, with everyone?

"...Orimura, did you read the reference book before entering the school?"

Waiting for an opportunity at the side of the classroom , Chifuyu-nee asked. Alright, I decided to reply honestly.

"I mistook it for the old telephone book and threw it away."

PANG!

"Didn't I write 'compulsory to read' on it, you fool?"

Another 5,000 of my brain cells died. Damn it, it'll be cheaper to have the coroner to give me a checkup now.

"I'll issue you another copy later, but you must memorize it within a week, got it?"

"No, that, the thickness is a little..."

"I'm telling you to do it."

"...Fine, I'll do it."

Already surpassing the designation of demonic sergeant, Chifuyu-nee glared at me. A devil, she's a devil in human clothing. She's a human and yet she's so inconsiderate, how could she not understand the limitations of human beings?

"Whether it's in terms of mobility, firepower or suppressing ability, the IS far surpasses all the older weapons in that aspect. If you don't understand this weapon 'thoroughly' before operating it, accidents will occur. We teach you basic knowledge and train you to

prevent such accidents from occurring. Even if you can't understand, memorize it, and remain strong and steady. These are the rules and regulations."

Yes, that's completely true.

Let me add on one thing, I didn't wish to be here.

One day, a group of black-clad men came up beside me, said something about 'we'll protect you' and left a notification letter regarding enrolment into the IS Academy. I don't understand, does this 'protection' consist of tossing a boy into a girls' garden and abandoning him? Right now, I want protection, and Chifuyu-nee's the reason.

"...You brat, you're thinking that you didn't come here of your own choice, right?"

I was shocked. Why did she consider it alright to reveal my thoughts so brazenly?

"No matter whether you wished for it or not, people can't get away from an interactive life. If you want to abandon it, abandon your identity as a human first."

As sharp as ever, it's about time for me to face reality. Chifuyu-nee was a realistic person right from the very beginning, and I know the reason.

"..."

Ho— looks like I have to work.

Well, maybe I won't be able to get to the level where Chifuyu-nee wont be all red in the face, but at least I don't want her to be embarrassed on the professional field.

I won't abandon my family members, unlike my parents who I had never seen.

"Th-Then, Orimura-kun, I'll teach you everything that you don't know, so you must work hard? Alright? Alright?"

Yamada-sensei tightened her hands and closed in. As she's shorter than me, it naturally turned to her shyly looking away.

"Yes. Then, I'll leave it to sensei after school."

After saying that, I sat down. Chifuyu-nee also returned to the side of the classroom.

"After-, after school... a teacher together with a student , two people alone after school... Ah! No, no, Orimura-kun. Your sensei will become weak when she's forced... and this is my first time with a guy..."

Suddenly blushing and saying such things. Yamada-sensei, are you alright? IS pilots really have no resistance to males. Speaking of which, all the stares directed at me are very uncomfortable. If these stares could generate a physical force, I would have become a pincushion.

"How-However, if it's Orimura-sensei's younger brother, then..."

"Ah—ack ack! Yamada-sensei, continue with the lesson."

"Ye-Yes!"

Chifuyu-nee coughed twice, causing Yamada-sensei to return from her fantasy.

Yamada-sensei frantically moved back to the stage—and failed.

"Uu—it hurts..."

(...Is she alright? This teacher...)

Only then did I realize just how many catastrophes I would be in for.

--

"Ahh, can I have a moment?"

"Huh?"

During the break after the second period, again I was confronted with a feeling of uneasiness. Suddenly being asked to talk caused my response to come out somewhat weird.

The girl who asked was naturally blond. She's stared at me, and her blue eyes which are held exclusively by people of white descent revealed a sense of unhappiness.

Her hair was slightly curled up, giving off a sense of nobility. Her radiating demeanour was that which women normally give off in today's society.

In current day society, due to the IS, women are given higher status. It's not just a privilege, even the archetype of 'women = great' came into being. At the same time, men were relegated to being slaves, manual labor. Right now in the city, it's not rare to see men being abused by women they never met on the streets.

Anyway, in the minds of the women nowadays, men are basically considered servants. To be honest, that's not necessarily a bad role.

On a side note, since this IS Academy has the duty to accept a large number of students, it's not rare to see foreign students enrolled here. Even among the victors , only half the girls in the class are Japanese.

"Are you listening? Hello?"

"Ah-, ah, yes, I'm listening... was there something you wanted?"

Upon hearing my reply, the girl in front of me deliberately increased her volume.

"Wait a second! What are you saying? Just with me talking to you should be enough to make you feel greatly honored. Shouldn't you have a better attitude towards me?"

"..."

To be honest, this is the kind of person that I'm the worst at dealing with.

Being able to use an IS means that the person will become part of their country's military. Thus, IS pilots are held in high regard, and currently, only females are IS pilots.

But the difference between that and flaunting power is that if the power is begotten through violence, it's just a tool for violence.

"I'm sorry. But I have no idea who you are."

It's true. Even though I did pay attention to the self-introductions and all sorts of rhetoric, I couldn't

recall what was said before, to my defense Chifuyu-nee being my homeroom teacher was a rather shocking experience.

However, my reply didn't seem to go over too well with the girl in front of me (it would be great if she would tell me her name). She narrowed her eyes to slits and said in a tone conveying complete contempt with regards to men.

"You don't recognize who i am? You don't know who Cecilia Alcott is? You've never heard of me? The representative candidate student for England and the top scorer of the school's entrance exam?"

Ah, so her name's Cecilia. Oh—

"Well, may I ask a question?"

"Humph, it's the job of a noble to answer the requests made by people of the lower class, so you may ask."

"What's a representative candidate student?"

KA—THUNK! Several girls eavesdropping on our conversation collapsed onto the floor.

"A, a, a..."

"Ahh?"

"Are, are you serious?"

She really looked angry now. If this were a manga, she would most likely have a crossed-vein popping out of her forehead.

"Ah. Because I really don't know."

If I don't know something, I have to honestly admit to it. It would be to my own demise if I do otherwise and want to try to maintain a good standing.

"..."

After being angry for a bit, Cecilia actually calmed down. She pressed her thumb against her temples, conveying a headache, grumbling...

"I can't believe this, this is really quite unbelievable. Though this is a land to the far east, this is not some under developed country. This is common knowledge, common knowledge. Don't tell me you don't have a television..."

How rude, I do have a television, it's just that I don't normally watch it.

"What's a representative candidate?"

"The pilot of a country's IS is decided from the pool of representative candidates, which means the elites...you, should be able to understand what the words mean."

"Now that you mentioned it, that does ring a bell."

Seems like it's true that it's easier to forget simple things.

"That's right, we're elites."

Oh, she revived. As expected of a representative candidate.

She pointed her finger at me, the tip nearly touching the tip of my nose.

"It's a miracle for you get into the same class with the chosen ones... you should feel blessed. Do you realize the situation that you're currently in now?"

"Is that so? How fortunate for me."

"...Are you trying to make a fool out of me?"

Wasn't it you who told me how lucky I was?

"In the first place, you knew nothing about IS', and yet you were able to make it into this school. When I first heard that you were the only male in the world who could pilot an IS. It had me expecting a lot more of you."

"Making assumptions about me, will only leave me in an uncomfortable situation."

"Humph. Because I'm an elite, I'll even be nice to people like you."

Oh, what a friendly attitude. This is the first time I've experienced something like this during my 15 years of life.

"If you don't fully understand anything regarding IS. Hm... if you cry and beg me, I may be inclined to teach you. After all, I'm an elite amongst elites, the 'only' one who defeated an instructor during the entrance exam."

It feels like she purposely emphasized on the word ' only' —eh, hm?

"That's the entrance exam you're talking about, right? Are you talking about initiating the IS?"

"What else?"

"That? Well, I managed to beat an instructor as well."

"Huh...?"

That's what happened. Though rather than defeated, I evaded the instructor that had suddenly come charging towards me. She accidentally crashed into the wall and was unable to move. That's all.

Maybe my words caused quite a shock to her, since Cecilia widened her eyes in disbelief.

"But, but I heard that I was the only one?"

"Maybe it's because I'm not a girl?"

Pacha. Ah, that's not a good sound. It sounded like walking on cracked ice.

"In-, in other words, I'm not the only one?"

"Well, I don't know."

"You! You said that you beat an instructor, right?"

"Mm, well. Something like that."

"Something like that? What do you mean by that?"

"Erm, calm down, okay?"

"How-? How can I calm down after hearing that—?!"

DING—DONG—DANG—DONG.

The bell for third period interrupts our conversation. It felt like a saving grace to me now.

"...! I'll be back! Don't run away! All right?"

Not good, such a reply would likely make her angry. I had to promise her.

"For the remaining time, we'll mainly be describing all sorts of equipment that can be used in actual combat, and their characteristics."

Chifuyu-nee replaced Yamada-sensei, who taught the first and second period lessons, as she stood at the front. Seemed like this was important, as even Yamada-sensei took out a notebook.

"Ah, but before that, we have to decide on the class representative who'll take part in the inter-class tournament."

Suddenly thinking about it, Chifuyu-nee seemed to have mentioned it before. Hm? Inter-class tournament? Representative?

"The class representative is as its name indicates. The class representative will not only compete in the tournament, but will also attend student council meetings and committee meetings as well. Well, you can consider it like a class leader. On a side note, the inter-class battles are meant to gauge each enrolled class' ability. Though there isn't much difference right now, competition will encourage further improvement."

The class started to become abuzz. Not knowing what's going on, I didn't even know the significance of what was going on. Hm, anyway, what I can deduce is that we're deciding on our class rep now. Seems like it'll

be extremely bothersome, and the person who'll be doing it will have quite a rough time.

"Sensei, I recommend Orimura-kun!"

—Hm? There's someone else who's called Orimura in this class? What a coincidence.

"I feel that it's a good idea too!"

Hm. So do I. Anyone will do, as long as it's not me.

"Then the candidate will be Orimura Ichika... is there anyone else? You can either nominate yourself or another person, both are fine."

Hoho, wait there's only one Orimura Ichika in this class... —ACK, there's no way this could happen!

"M-Me?"

I immediately stood up, and what struck me were the piercing stares. Even without looking back, I knew that they conveyed irresponsible expectations of 'if it's him, he can do it'.

"Sit down, Orimura, you're a troublesome sight. Then, isn't there anyone else? If so, Orimura will be elected without a vote."

"W-Wait a second! I don't want this—!"

"I said that no matter whether you nominated yourself or someone 'else' nominated you, the one nominated doesn't have the right to refuse. The one nominated should be prepared already."

"Ev-Even if I'm not willing—"

Just as I was trying to protest, I got cut off by a highly enthusiastic voice.

"Hold on a minute! I can't accept this outcome!"

PAM! Cecilia slammed her hands against the table as she got up, her figure became a lot more intimidating. Oh , so that's how you exert yourself. I really have to get on her good side.

"This kind of election outcome is totally unacceptable! Anyway, having a man as our class representative is totally disgraceful! Do you expect me, Cecilia Alcott to endure this embarrassment for a whole year?"

That's right, talk, keep talking... hm?

"In terms of ability, it's obvious that I should be the class representative. It'll be troubling if some rare far-east monkey is to be chosen because he is a rare breed! I came to this island country to polish up my IS skills, and I have no interest in joining a circus!"

That's weird, how come I'm no longer human? Why? Speaking of which, Britain is an island itself, right? That means that Britain and Japan aren't much different.

"Isn't that right!? Only the most talented can be the class representative, and I'm the most suitable one!"

She could not hold back her excitement—speaking of which, as Cecilia's getting more into it, her choices of words were getting more and more crude, more anger-driven. Though I didn't want to be the class rep, even a simpleton would get somewhat upset from being told off to such an extent.

"In the first place, living in such a country with an underdeveloped level of culture is excruciatingly painful for me—"

Wala.

"Even if Britain's a powerful country, you're far too arrogant on your part, right? How many years has it been now that you've won the world's worst cuisine award?"

—Ah.

"Wha...!?"

In the end, I said it. Just like that, it slipped out of my mouth.

I gingerly turned my head to face her. Right now, Cecilia could only be described as furious, the thoroughly red face indicating her rage.

Wah... I messed up...

"You, you, you! Are you insulting my country?"

Ah—. Really, now there was no way I could stop this. Right now, we're past the point of no return.

"It's a duel!"

PAM! Cecilia slams her hands on the table. In the next instant, she would have thrown her gauntlets, had she been wearing any. In other words, this is a battle of pride?

"Oh, great, bring it on. It's better than a debate anyway ."

"You talk big. Since you deliberately asked for defeat, I'll accept you as a servant —no, a slave!"

"Don't look down on me. This is a serious showdown, don't try and do it halfheartedly."

"Is that so? Perfect timing, this will be the perfect opportunity for me, Britain's candidate, Cecilia Alcott to display her ability."

In the end it became a duel, a boy shouldn't be fighting seriously with a girl, right? What should I do?

"How much of a handicap do you want?"

"Oh my, asking for a favor so soon?"

"No, I'm asking how much of a handicap I should give you."

At that moment, the class erupted with laughter.

"O-Orimura-kun, are you serious?"

"Isn't a man being stronger than woman a story of the past?"

"Orimura-kun. Maybe you can pilot an IS, but that's just overdoing it."

Just as everyone's laughing —damn it, that seemed to be the case.

Of course, men are overwhelmingly weaker. They're powerless. It's true that only a few can pilot an IS, but all females are potential IS pilots. In contrast, men logically can't pilot an IS at all. If a war happens because of a difference in views between men and women, the male faction probably wouldn't even last 3 days. If there's a champion, we'd likely be suppressed within 3 hours. This

is because as a super weapon, an IS far exceeds fighter planes, tanks and battleships of the past.

"...Then I won't give you a handicap."

"Yes, that should be the case. More accurately, it bothers me that I don't have to give you a handicap. Hum hum, saying that men are stronger than women, Japanese males really have quite a sense of humour."

The excitement had just now died down. Though, Cecilia's expression is one of contempt.

"Hey, Orimura-kun, it's not too late, you know? You can still get Cecilia-san to give you a handicap?"

The girl sitting diagonally behind me sincerely advised . However, the complicated expression of hers—the laughter and smirk that she was visibly holding back made me even angrier.

"A man would never go back on his word. I have no need of a handicap."

"Hai —a representative candidate is being looked down on. Or is it that you don't know what an IS battle looks like?"

"..."

To be honest, I had never seen a real IS battle before. At most, I secretly watched videos of Chifuyu-nee while she was doing her military service (because Chifuyu-nee didn't want to see me get involved with IS).

"Then, we have a common understanding. The battle will take place next Monday in the 3rd arena. Orimura and Alcott, make sure you are well prepared. Now, let's get back to the lesson."

Chifuyu-nee clapped her hands to end the conversation. I harbored an uneasy feeling as I sat down, speechless.

(I can master the basics in a week. It shouldn't be too hard. Also, I did manage to activate it during the entrance exams. Never mind, I'll think of something once I get there.)

However, after I get past that battle, I'll be taking the position of class representative. Though it's a headache, I can't back down now. And I won't get a second chance.

(Alright, time to pay attention to class.)

I immediately opened the textbook on the table.

"Ugh..."

After school, I moaned while tiredly sprawling on to the table.

"No, I didn't understand anything at all... why must it be so complicated...?"

Anyway, I became a soldier specialized in terminology , and had to investigate all sorts of vocabulary. However, it seemed like there wasn't any IS specific terminology, which in other words means that I haven't done anything constructive today.

Even though it's after school, the situation hasn't changed a single bit. As usual, the other students from different years and classes aren't approaching me, and are instead muttering things amongst themselves.

(Ku... spare me the agony...)

It was the same during afternoon break, and it could be said that I'm in a living hell. I went to the cafeteria, and all the girls were following behind me, and it's not like they're my honor guards. And when I went to the canteen, the situation was like Moses splitting the sea, and I ended up in a blank slate situation. Am I some mystical animal who only just arrived at Japan for the first time? Speaking of which, there seemed to be one species of Mexican Salamander that's commonly talked about (An amphibian axolotl). I couldn't even tell what kind of creature it was with just the name alone.

"Ah, Orimura-kun, you're still in the classroom? That's good."

"Is there something you needed?"

Being addressed, I lifted up my head. It's my vice homeroom teacher, Yamada-sensei, standing in front of me holding a book.

She's a teacher no matter how it looks, and as expected , my first impression of her is that she's short, even though she's basically at the height of an ordinary girl.

"Well, your dorm's ready."

Yamada-sensei said as she handed over a paper with the dorm number on it and a key.

That's right, the IS Academy is a boarding school, and the school requires all students to live on the campus. Most likely, this is to protect these IS pilots who have unlimited potential. Truly, these individuals are integral to the future defense of countries. Ever since this school started, there have been a few countries who have tried to tempt them, and this isn't uncommon at all.— Speaking of which, every country has been trying to lure over elite pilots.

"Wasn't my room still undecided on? I heard that it might take a week."

"That's the case, but special circumstances require special solutions; seems like you were forced to change rooms... Orimura-kun, have you heard anything from the government?"

The last few words were said softly, so that only I could hear them.

On a side note, the government she's referring to is obviously the Japanese government. Without exception, there haven't been any 'male' IS pilots before, so even the country has taken measures to protect and keep watch over me.

Ever since news about me as an IS pilot broke out, it was either the mass media, the ambassadors from other countries, or even human DNA research people that were sent over, saying that 'we have to do a live sample no matter what'. Whoever would go along with that is an idiot.

"Because of those circumstances, the government created a special directive. Anyway, you'll live in a dorm until your room is prepared in a month. So until then, please endure, and live with others."

"...Well, Yamada-sensei, your breath is making my ear all itchy."

Speaking of which, how long is she going to bite on my ear? Everyone else in the class really seems to be enjoying this.

"Ah, no, this is because... it wasn't on purpose..."

"There's no need to apologize, I know... since there's a room for me, I've got to go back and get my stuff. So can I go back home today?"

"Ah, no need. If it's luggage—"

"I've already arranged everything. Be sure that you are grateful for this."

Oh my, this voice definitely belongs to Chifuyu-nee. Immediately, the tune of Darth Vader played in my mind without a moment's hesitation. On a side note, there's also another tune in my mind. It's called the Terminator.

"I-I'm extremely thankful for it..."

"Well, it's just some daily necessities. Some changes of clothing and a cellphone charger should be enough, I suppose."

As expected of an unrefined and careless individual. In truth, she's right, but personally, I feel that everyday conveniences are important as well, nee-san.

"Then please use this time and head to the dormitory. For dinner, please be sure to head down to the first-year

dorm cafeteria from 6 to 7pm. On a side note, each room has a shower, and there's a large public bath. The time to use it differs by school year...hm, well, currently, Orimura-kun is not allowed to use the large public bath."

"Eh, why?"

I really like bathing in a large public bath.

"Are you an idiot? Do you want to bath together with girls of the same age as you?"

"Ah—..."

Oh yeah. Besides me, everyone here is a girl.

"Ya, Orimura-kun, you want to bathe with a girl!? No, we can't allow it."

"No, it's not that. I don't want to bathe together."

I don't know if I'm unlucky or what. Speaking of which, it's forbidden outside school as well. This is an ethical issue.

"Wha? You're not interested in girls!? That, that could become a problem..."

What now. She has no clue what I'm talking about.

Immediately as the words left Yamada-sensei's mouth, it would spread around rumors like a broken telephone. The females' chatter in the corridors started to intensify.

"Don't tell me Orimura-kun's only interested in guys..."

"However... that's not bad."

"We'll need to check starting from his middle school days! It'll be done soon! The results will be here in 2 days. "

Talking about this and that.

"Then, I have a meeting to attend to, so goodbye. Orimura-kun, please head to your dorm room, and don't wander about aimlessly."

Considering that the distance from the school to the dorm is only 50m, do I need to be heading there directly even with it being so close?

It's true that they have all sorts of facilities here, all sorts of club rooms, IS arenas, IS maintenance rooms, and IS development rooms. But today, I won't be able to go to

them, and it's not like I won't be able to visit them another day. Therefore, I may as well rest for today. Finally, I will be able to get away from the girls' prying eyes.

"Ho—..."

Watching Chifuyu-nee and Yamada-sensei as they walked out of the classroom, I sighed as I stood up. I could still hear the ruckus coming from both inside and outside the classroom, but today, I won't worry about it anymore. It'll better to be in my dorm than here.

"Hm~?, it's here, right? Room 1025."

I confirmed the room number and was about to insert the key. Eh, that's strange? The door was unlocked.

Kacha.

I entered the room, I saw 2 large beds, arranged side by side. I dare to bet that even a commercial hotel would not be able to compare to it. Just by looking at them it made me feel all light and fluffy. This should be the difference in level. Long live our country.

Temporarily tossing my luggage onto the floor beside the bed, I immediately leapt at it...ohhh, how soft. These are definitely high-priced beds and quilts.

"Is anyone there?"

Suddenly, a voice came from inside. Maybe since the door was blocking it, the voice sounded a bit deep. Speaking of which, every room should have a bathroom, right? –Hm?

"Ahh, you're my roommate, right? Please take care of me from this year on."

—I had a bad feeling about this, this uneasy feeling trickled up my legs.

"I was using the shower, so I'm sorry for looking like this. My name is Shinonono—"

"—Houki...?"

The one who came out from the bathroom was my childhood friend, who I had completed my reunion with.

She had just finished showering, and now walked out of the bathroom. Seems like the bathroom is constructed

to be both a shower and a changing room. And without confirming that the other person's a girl, Houki walked out with only a towel wrapped around her. Ah, it's not a ponytail.

The small surface area of the towel could mean several things. Below the edges were the naked and tender thighs; and seemingly indicating that she just showered, the water droplets... skirted down her legs. Healthy white skin is a real eye-opener.

Above that is the slender body that had been rigorously trained, and I could see it even though she had a towel on. It really made my heart race, and thus I'm really weak toward women with unique curves.

Pressing a hand in front of her chest, the large breasts behind her towel were lifted up. No matter what, the last time I saw her body was during swimming lessons in 4th grade, and it didn't really leave me with much of an impression. To think that Houki would choose to wear thin clothing—the above 0.3 seconds of thought was over .

"..."

Houki was shocked. I was too. The all-Japan's most shocked person tournament had begun.

"I-I-Ichika..."

"Oh-, mm..."

I made a definite reply, and Houki's face became extremely red. Basically, this should happen when two people of opposite genders are face to face with each other after a bath, right? Even I would be rather troubled with how to react and handle a situation like this.

"...? Do-Don't look!"

"So-Sorry!"

I frantically turned my head aside and looked away. From the image I managed to see from the corner of my eye, Houki tightly wrapped the towel around herself, as if she was trying to hide her body (or protect it)...the cleavage of her breasts, that was obvious due to the movements of her arms. This made my heart race even faster.

"Wh-Wh-Why, are, you, here...?"

Houki stiffly asked, and it sounded like gears clattering with one another.

"Well, I'm also staying her—"

Out of the corner of my eye, she took action. Extremely fast, as expected of the champion of the National Kendo competition. Houki grabbed the bokken beside the wall, whirled it around and quickly thrust it forward. She lowered her body and instantly decreased the distance between us –I'm about to die!

"Uootsuge!" (sound effect)

I jumped down from the bed and retreated towards the door.

Pada!

I managed to escape outside the room in the nick of time. The inertia created by the joints threw me forward.

"Saved—"

Chi Dong! The sound of the door splitting could be heard.

The bokken broke through beside my head, the tip missing me barely by 2mm. Hey, this is a wooden door. To be able to stab a bokken through a wooden door, what kind of skill is this?

Ci *ci* *ci*...the blade sank back through the door. Ho, so she's letting me off?

Ci Dong! The sound of the wooden door exploding could be heard again.

"Are you really trying to kill me? I'd be dead if I didn't dodge that!"

A sudden barrage of attacks had stabbed through where my head was a few moments ago.

"...What? What?"

"Ah, it's Orimura-kun!"

"Huh—, so Orimura-kun lives in this room? That's a good piece of information~~!"

With all the commotion that was caused, the girls started to emerge from their rooms.

Also, what's troubling is that they're all in simple nightgowns, completely oblivious to a guy seeing them in it. Some of them had taken it a step further, wearing only a shirt, and not wearing pants or skirts. Instead, I could see white inverted triangles. And also, some of them were wearing blouses, and I could see flesh-colored chests...girls, should you really be revealing your underwear so casually? In more ways than one, is this really alright?

"...Houki, Houki-san, please let me in. It's going to turn out badly. I'll apologize, so please, I'm begging you like this."

I clapped my hands together and lift them above my head. I must pass these feelings over.

"..."

The only response I got from inside is silence. However, the bokken was pulled back. I sincerely hope that there wouldn't be a third attack.

Silence...

After that, it was silent for about 2, 3 minutes, but to me, it felt like an hour.

Ka cha.

"...Come in."

"Woah, oh."

The door opened, and Houki's wearing kendo attire. Looks like this was the only clothes she could put on quickly. Truthfully, since she was hasty in wearing it, she didn't manage to tie her belt properly.

Either way, I was granted permission to enter, and entered my room... eh? There's something strange about that, right?

"What now?"

A fierce glare. I was glared at. Sorry, I didn't do anything wrong.

Houki sat down on the bed. Ah, oh dear, she wants to deal with me inside.

"..."

Looking rather angry, Houki quickly tied her wet hair back into a ponytail. Hm, it's the Houki that I knew, at least that's what she seemed like from the outside.

"So, you said that you're my roommate?"

"Oh, yeah, it seems so."

I was glared at. This girl, her eyes were as sharp as bamboo. Really alert and piercing.

"What-, what's your purpose?"

"Huh?"

"I'm asking what you were thinking? Boys and girls can't share the same bed after they turn 7, it's common sense!"

What era was that from? Even though it's not the same bed, for 15 year old males and females to be living together... err... living together might be problematic.

"Wa, wa, wa...!"

"Wa?"

"Was it because you asked for this...? To be in my room ..."

"That's stupid."

Why would I purposely risk my life and choose something like this? Besides, I did not.

—However, it seemed that I had failed with my answer, for if I had not, the bokken wouldn't be flying toward me.

"That-!, that was close!"

A close call. It's really a close call situation that I had blocked the bokken, and there would be a fatality if it had hit. From a certain manner of speech, it's now an empty-handed vs. katana situation. Even though it's a bokken, my palms were hurting. Because there's no way that the assault's strength could be canceled.

"Stupid... you're saying that's stupid? So it's like that huh, like that..."

Ah, her expression was scary. Very scary. Even though she says that she's a childhood friend, but in fact she's a member of a secret organization, a code-named assassin, tasked with executing a certain assignment.

Even though the wooden sword had been blocked by me, Houki was still continuing to exert pressure on the sword. Not good, this is going to be complicated. It isn't a real sword, so it can't cut me to death, but if this weight hit my head, I'd be knocked out. The worst scenario would be my skull splitting in two. No, it can't end like this.

"..."

No, I withdraw my previous statements. The Houki standing before me is already a reaper, so even though it isn't a real sword it can still split me into two parts. Also, if you add to the fact that she had been using her own weight from the beginning to force the sword down, it means that right now the situation looks as if Houki is forcing me down ——

"Waaah... Shinonono-san, very bold"

"You shouldn't take the lead."

"The way Orimura-kun is getting it isn't bad either..."

Hey, what's the meaning of that last comment. Also, five faces were peeking in from outside the open door, there was probably over five times as many in the corridor, also watching what was going on inside the room.

"Wh-wh-wha...?

Houki, greatly surprised, immediately got off my body . I'm saved. My life is preserved.

"Ah, it's already finished?"

"The feeling obviously wasn't bad—"

Hey. Do high school girls nowadays say 'the feeling wasn't bad' when they see a murder scene? Please remember. In a few moments you'll see me giving your e-mail addresses to Gotanda.

"........!"

Houki quietly chased the girls out, and whole-heartedly closed the door. As if entering a scene of

murder. It looks like establishing a fictional setting was the highest priority. Though, what about the alibi? No, wait a moment, it's only that I didn't think about it, maybe that girl has some assurance, and she'll be protected. What's that? That way the victim could disappear. What a scary world.

"...Ichika..."

"Yes, what is it?"

I am facing death, without entanglement. Ah, humans arriving to this point are unimpeded.

"What's with your face..."

"?"

Wasn't it like this when I was born?

"Nothing, that, about the situation right now?"

Ah, how I will be executed. You know, Houki, the problem with murder isn't what's before, but after. The human body is composed of slightly over 50kg of lipids (fat) and proteins. It also includes about more than 10L of blood. After that are the neglected bones in the skeleton.

In fact, the discomposure of the upper part of the skeleton is quicker. Isn't it different from what we think? That is why most people are puzzled. For the analysis of the skeleton a considerable amount of experience is needed, and if you do it one by one, a lot of time will be wasted. That's when the freezer comes in to play. The freezer...

"Are you listening, Ichika?"

"Uh-, uh!? What!? No I'm not!?"

"Is there someone who would actually say that he isn't, stupid..."

She sighed, as if she were resigning, seemingly amazed. Hmm, it seems that I did something wrong. Considerable amount of guilt. So I didn't feel comfortable . But if I run away I wouldn't be a man.

"So-Sorry, can you tell me again..."

Someone who acknowledges their own faults needs to lower their head. It's common sense everywhere in the world.

——Even though I don't think like that, but in front of an angry individual, one ought to acknowledge their faults first. That way the world could grow in harmony.

"That-, that's why. To be placed in this room... that-, what. That means that drawing a line in the aspect of living is needed..."

The voice was indistinct at first, but she said the latter half forcefully. Say, why is Houki looking very uncomfortable? It's probably psychological, her cheeks are also red... a fever?

"First is the bathing schedule. Mine is from seven o'clock to eight. Ichika is from eight to nine."

"Uhm, isn't it better if mine is earlier..."

"Do you want me to wait with my body drenched by sweat from my club activities!?"

"Club activities, is it the kendo club?"

"Ye-Yeah."

"Weird. Doesn't the club have showers?"

"I-, I don't feel easy if it's not in my own room!"

Uh, if you say it like that then I can't object to it. I also think that the washroom at home is better than the ones at school.

"Oh? Speaking of which, there's no toilet in our private rooms right?"

"Yeah, there are only two at either end of each floor."

"That means, there aren't any men's bathrooms?"

I just thought about this problem merely by chance. But it's really like this, from the IS academy's foundation there were only girls, so there wasn't any reason to make a men's bathroom.

"....."

"Eh, that, what should I do?"

"I don't know! Can't you just ask a teacher?"

Even if you say it like that, but in the worst case——

"In the worst case, only the women's bathroom can be used...?"

A killing intent suddenly burst forth, and I immediately turned around. To only see, Houki again holding her sword. She points at me with her bokken, conveying an aura of a reaper.

"You, you, we haven't seen each other for a long time, and you've engaged in these perverted interests... I've misjudged you!"

"Hey!? Why would I become what you said, Houki!"

"Isn't it obvious! Wanting to go into the women's bathroom, if you're not a pervert then what else could you be!? Hum, I'll execute you right now!"

"Like I'd let you!"

For the time being I found a shinai at the edge of her luggage. It was near Houki's personal things, stacked by her suitcase.

(I need to use the shinai well... you, in the past you didn't need me nagging)

If the bokken and the shinai cross, the shinai could break. Anyway I'll just be holding the shinai until Houki calms down. With that thought I pulled out the sword.

(Hmm? It seems like there's something blocking the shinai preventing it from being pulled out)

Shaa.

"Aaaaaahhhhh!?"

Finally I pulled out the shinai, and confronted Houki while keeping a reasonable distance between us.

"?"

In front of the shinai, Houki's mouth was opening and closing like a goldfish. Panicking and looking freaked out .

"Hmm? That, what's that...?

I suddenly noticed something unusual attached to the shinai. If I try to summarize, it has a structure of two parallel triangles attached together, and the thing is——

"Re-re-return it to me!!"

She quickly tried snatching at it, the bokken had been abandoned on the bed.

With unbelievable speed Houki grabbed the thing attached to the shinai, and she covered it with both of her hands.

"....."

Weird? Why is she staring at me while blushing? A fever?

——Ah.

Suddenly, I thought about the things in relation to one another. I know what the thing with which I was in contact is. I finally understood.

"Houki."

"Wh-what?"

As if she was protecting something, Houki changed from the offensive. Now she was vigilant in keeping distance between herself and me.

I looked at the gap, and clearly saw a light pink, light blue fabric. Ah, I'm sure now.

"I see you've started wearing bras."

" ~ !!!"

Dong! An explosive sound rang inside my head.

Chapter 2: Class Representative Selection Match!

"Hey..."

"..."

"Hey, how long are you going to remain angry?"

"...I'm not angry."

"You're not looking too happy."

"I've been like this since I was born."

Acting so indifferent.

On a side note, it's 8 am on the second day of school. We're in the first-years' cafeteria, and like before, there are girls all around us. I'm still rather shocked that even the staff members are female (though it's logical).

I, who supposedly had a "same-room-relation", am having breakfast together with Houki; but ever since last night, we never had a proper conversation.

On a side note, my breakfast is of the traditional Japanese style, including natto, blocks of salmon, miso

soup and mild pickle, very delicious. Maybe it's because of the exorbitant taxes. Long live Nationalism.

And on another side note, Houki and I ordered the same thing. As a Japanese, I do feel that having rice for breakfast is still the best. Even though I like bread as well , this salmon is so delicious that it fits my tastes. The rice is soft and hot, wonderful. An electric rice cooker can't make this taste, so was it cooked over a rice stove?

"..."

I've been ignored. As if in agreement with the me who's being ignored, Houki picks up a piece of salmon.

—Never mind, that is nothing. I grew up living with Chifuyu-nee, so I don't have that feeling of 'I'm living with a girl! My heart is beating like crazy! I'm so nervous! '. Besides, I handled many years of Chifuyu-nee's dirty laundry, so I'm not going to panic just because of a piece of girl's underwear.

But then again, maybe my experiences don't have any sort of relation with my childhood friend Houki.

In other words, Houki's unhappy because of my attitude when I saw her underwear...right? Hm? That's strange? Why is Houki angry?

"As I said, I'm not angry."

Even though the person in front of me said this, she didn't turn her face towards me at all, and even when our eyes met, she would look away frantically. Hm, if it wasn't for her angry expression, I would believe that the world was peaceful.

"Look look, he's the famous boy ~~"

"Seems like he's also Chifuyu nee-sama's younger brother, you know."

"Huh—, so both siblings are IS users? Is he strong?"

Today's the same as usual. The girls keep their distance, forming a perimeter around me, known as ' even though he's delicious, don't be greedy'. If it were far-sea fishing, it would be quite a catch...hm, that's just a meaningless example.

"So as I was saying, Houki—"

"Don't call me by my name."

"...Shinonono-san."

"..."

If she won't allow me to use her name, I'll just use her surname. This time though, she could only remain silent. The fact that Houki doesn't like to be called by her surname hasn't changed, huh? Besides, this name has quite the history—

"O-Orimura-kun, can we sit here, please?"

"Huh?"

I could see three girls holding their trays of breakfast as they anxiously waited for my reply.

"Well, it's not like you can't."

The girl who tried to talk up to me finally heaved a sigh of relief. Behind her, her two friends were secretly encouraging her. Nearby, there was quite a commotion.

"Ah~ I should have tried to talk to him earlier..."

"It-it's just the second day. Nothing to panic over!"

"Say, speaking of which, the people who rushed into the room yesterday are present as well!"

"WHAT DID YOU SAY!?"

...Ah, mm, that's right. 8 first-years, 15 second-years and 33 third-years came over to introduce themselves. It's already tough enough to memorize all their names. On a side note, if anyone's to come up to me and ask me ' do you remember me?', the probability of me remembering them is only about 20%. This is too cruel.

It's early in the morning, and I can't even remember three names.

On a side note, those three probably had their seats assigned, so they managed to sit down quickly. A six-seater table. Houki and I are sitting on the side nearest to the window, and they filled up three seats. As for the remaining one, I hope that no one will squeeze in.

"Wow, Orimura-kun, you do eat a lot in the morning—
"

"He, he's a guy, you know."

"I'm the type who eats very little at night, so I have to eat a lot in the morning or else I won't be able to make it."

On a side note, this is true. After experiencing it for many years, testing all sorts of methods, this is still somewhat helpful in maintaining my body shape and health. I learnt it from Chifuyu-nee.

"Is it alright to eat that little for breakfast?"

The trio, though they had three different menus, they all had a drink, a piece of bread and a side dish (very little of it, by the way).

"U-Us?"

"M, yes, is it alright?"

The fuel cost is extremely cheap. Don't tell me the reason why only girls can pilot IS is because of this?

"Because we eat a lot of snacks—"

...You'll grow fat if you eat too many snacks. Besides, that's not good for one's health, isn't it? Is this really good ? Their glory of ten years are going to run out. A human starts to age from the age of 22, it seems.

"...Orimura, I'm going off."

"Ah? Okay. See you later."

After Houki cleanly finished her breakfast, she left her seat. Though it was a buffet, she still chose a traditional meal. As always, she's trying to maintain a samurai image. She should be like Japan's excellent traditional Yamato Nadeshiko. No, well, I don't know what qualities a Yamato Nadeshiko should have.

(But since Houki's the one living with me, well, at least it's better than living with someone I'm unfamiliar with.)

Houki and I are childhood friends. When I was in first grade, Chifuyu-nee brought me to the Shinonono dojo to train, and until 4th grade we remained in the same class.

For some reasons, we didn't have any parents, so Chifuyu-nee and I were often taken care of by Shinononos' parents and were invited for dinner. Truthfully, it really helped us a lot while we were poor.

However, instead of saying that our relationship was bad, let's say it was terrible. Though we walked down the same path—called comrades as samurais, we parted ways soon after (I'm rather mindful about this.)

(I couldn't remember anything in the past at all...)

Never mind, it's not just me, everyone's the same now. The past is the past, and the present's the present.

"Orimura-kun, are you familiar with Shinonono-san?"

"Even though I heard that you two are living in the same room..."

"Ah, sort of. We're childhood friends."

Though I really don't know the significance behind this, there's still quite a commotion around us. Some people even let out a 'WHAT?'

"Huh, that's—"

The girl beside me—mm, Tanimoto-san? Just as I was about to ask, a clapping sound could be heard inside the canteen.

"How long are you going to eat!? You got to be fast when eating, be efficient! If you're late, you'll have to run around the field ten times!"

Chifuyu-nee's voice echoed throughout the canteen, and everyone inside frantically returned to eating their breakfast. If you want to know why, it's because one lap around the field in IS Academy is 5km—this is not a joke. I frantically finish up my food.

On a side note, it seems like Chifuyu-nee's acting as the first-years' dorm supervisor. As usual, she's not getting any rest at all.

Even though as her brother, I'm rather worried, but it should be alright. Truthfully, nobody can fight with Chifuyu-nee when it comes to not knowing fatigue.

(Never mind, I can't think of how to focus on learning the IS at all.)

Truthfully, I still have the match against Cecilia next week. Before that, I need to learn how to control the IS.

(Trying to control it, huh?)

—In the end, there wasn't any progress.

Before the second period ended, my mind was already all dizzy.

(Not good...)

Can't be helped. It's possible to understand terms through practice, but there are some parts that are impossible to understand in the first place.

Like a math problem that's impossible to solve no matter what. Yes, those kinds that are impossible to solve unless an example is given.

"..."

However, the situation now feels even more inexplicable. When I first touched the IS, it felt like I was familiar with it, with many years of experience. It's that kind of a feeling.

But I really can't understand by reading the textbook like this, that feeling is like 'did I really activate an IS before?'.

(Hm~...)

I folded my arms in front of me and stared at the textbook. Of course, we're having lessons now. Yamada-sensei may end up speechless at times, but she still continued to teach the students basic knowledge regarding IS.

"In other words, the IS was originally created for space work, so the pilot is covered in a special armor. Also, the armor has the ability to increase body functions and keep the pilots in a stable state. This increases the heart rate, pulse, lung capacity, amount of sweat lost, endorphins (amino acids that the brain releases during times of pain, exercise, excitement and other exciting things)—"

"Sensei, is that really alright? It's kind of scary when the body is manipulated like that."

One of my classmates said with an uncertain look on her face. It's true that the unique feeling created by piloting an IS may cause people to feel uncomfortable.

"It's not really that complicated. Oh yeah, for example, everyone's wearing a bra, right? If one has that kind of support, there's no reason that it will cause any adverse effects on humans. Of course, if it's not by your own measurements but out of shape, then—"

...Coincidentally, our eyes met, and Yamada-sensei just stood there, dumbfounded. Several seconds later, she blushed.

"Well, that, no, that's, Ori-Orimura-kun, you have no need to understand that. I, I don't know. This example. Ah, ah ha, ah hahaha..."

Yamada-sensei could only laugh blankly, unknowingly creating a subtle atmosphere throughout the classroom. Compared to me, some of the girls seemed to realize something as they folded their arms in front of their chests, looking like they were trying to hide their breasts.

Like the conversation with Houki yesterday, up till now, I don't have the interest of getting excited by seeing a girl's underwear. However, I'm surrounded by

this—wanting to see it and yet not wanting to see it at the same time—this itchy feeling, and I can't seem to calm down no matter what.

This abnormally bad atmosphere continued for another 10 or 20 seconds .

"Ahem, Yamada-sensei, please continue with the lesson."

"Ah, okay."

Deliberately faking a cough to disperse the atmosphere . Under Chifuyu-nee's prompt, Yamada-sensei returned back to topic even though it looked like she was about to bury herself in the book.

"Then, well, I got something important to say. The IS has something similar to a human's consciousness that can converse with the pilot—in other words, understanding each other by living together. Mm, the longer the operation time, the more the IS understands the pilot's characteristics."

I see. In other words, it means that I can't slack off during training.

"The more you understand each other, the more you can use its utmost capabilities. You have to understand that the IS isn't a tool, but your friend."

Immediately, a girl raised her hand.

"Sensei, is it like a lover~?"

"Well, that, mm...it should be that kind of feeling. I haven't experienced it before, so I don't really know..."

This so-called experience should be of a boy and girl being in a relationship. Ignoring Yamada-sensei, who lowered her head as she blushed, the girls in the class started to chatter about things related to boys and girls dating each other.

How should I say it? It's like this place is a bit too much like a 'girls' school' already. The air's full of sweetness, isn't it?

Honestly, this classroom—well, not just here, the air in the school is sweet. It's not the atmosphere, but rather, real sweetness. It's the aroma that only girls have. Anyway, this sweetness is everywhere. Actually, it is like this; it filled up my abdomen so much that I felt sick from it.

"..."

"Is, is there anything wrong, Orimura-kun?"

"Ah, it's nothing, nothing at all."

After hearing my words, Yamada-sensei vaguely waved her hand. It feels like someone's staring at me... seems like it's been since yesterday.

DING—DONG—DANG—DONG

"Ah, then, during the remaining time, we're going to start training on basic IS braking in the air."

Besides practical skills and other unique subjects, IS Academy is basically in charge of all the basic training. Within these 15 minutes of rest time, to the teachers who have to head back to the office, it's been tough on them.

"I say, Orimura-kun."

"Over here~ over here~, a question~ a question~"

"Do you have time during the day? Do you have time after school? Do you have time at night?"

So the scenario from yesterday has ended, hasn't it? Once Yamada-sensei and Chifuyu-nee walked out of the classroom, half of the girls wound up gathering around my desk. I just heard the words 'Can't delay this any longer!' and I guess that it's not a mistake on my part...

"Then, please listen to me—"

I was really bothered, and while I was trying to finish what I wanted to say, I saw a girl giving away some sort of coupons, and even receiving money for it. Please don't do any commercial businesses in school, just don't.

"..."

My childhood friend Houki wasn't far away from the group surrounding me as she looked on. Seems like she's still angry. Please don't complain silently, humans are learning creatures.

(But I'm already lost now. Even though I want to let Houki teach me about things related to IS...looks like I can only ask later.)

I thought, even if it was for only a short time, it was still hard to endure those 'hurry up and answer me' looks that the girls were showing. Now which question should I answer?

"How's Chifuyu-nee in her own house!?"

"Huh, unexpectedly—"

PAM!

"Break time's over. Scram."

Ah, when did she get behind me? She's the only one who would smack me at this time. She's here to prevent me from leaking information of her, right? Speaking of which, Chifuyu-nee, hitting people like that isn't going to give people a good impression. Is it really alright for you to do this?

"Oh yes, Orimura, your IS needs some more time before it can be prepared."

"What?"

"There's no available suit. So wait a while. It seems like the school's making a personal suit for you."

"???"

Just as I was confused, the entire classroom started buzzing.

"A, a personal suit? For a first year, and at this time!?"

"Which means that the government has given support.."

"Ah~ so good...I want to have my own personal suit soon."

What's going on? Is there anything really worth being envious of?

I just showed a look of not knowing anything at all, that Chifuyu-nee couldn't endure seeing as she muttered,

"Page 6 of the textbook. Read it out."

"Mn, mm... 'Today, even though we have links to many countries and enterprises that provide IS

technology, all the information related to the manufacturing of the core is never revealed. The cores of the 467 IS that exist in today's society are all created by Professor Shinonono. This core has been completely transformed into a black box, and none have achieved the success that Professor Shinonono has. However, the Professor has declined to continue creating more after a certain amount, and all countries, organizations and enterprises have started research, development and training of their own cores. The dealings of cores are against Title 7 of the Alaska Treaty, that these are forbidden no matter the circumstances'..."

"That's the case. You understand?"

"Sort, sort of..."

Mm, let me clear this up a bit.

1. There are only 467 IS existing in the entire world. 2. Only Professor Shinonono can create the cores, and the Professor's no longer willing to create more. 3. I got a special privilege, but this is a test prototype.

That's the case. Mm, I understand it rather clearly. On a side note, this Professor Shinonono is—

"Erm, sensei. Is Shinononon-san, a relative of Professor Shinonono...?"

A girl trembled as she asked Chifuyu-nee...that's right, this surname Shinonono will be discovered anyway.

—Shinonono Tabane, the complete genius who designed the IS all by herself. She was Chifuyu-nee's classmate, and Houki's elder sister. No matter how many times I met her, I always thought of her as—'genius'.

"That's right, Shinonono's that person's little sister."

Hey, sensei, is it really good to divulge other people's information like that? Actually, Tabane-nee is now a person who's placed under unique security that exceeds National laws. Though she's not a criminal, the whereabouts of the person who has all sorts of technology in regards to IS are unknown. This makes every related person to the governments and organizations feel rather insecure.

(However, she herself doesn't seem to mind though...)

Remembering that haughty look on her face, well, if I have to describe it, an example would be a 'cunning sheep'. On a side note, Chifuyu-nee's an 'honest wolf'. Hm, I'll call that rotating image. Rather suitable, isn't it?

"WHAAAAAT—! This, this is great! We have two famous people's relatives here!"

"That that, how's Professor Shinonono as a person!? She's a genius, right!?"

"So Shinonono-san's a genius too!? Teach me how to operate an IS the next time."

We were supposed to be having lessons now, but the girls were now gathered around Houki. Ah, if I look from here, it may make quite the nice scene. According to common sense, nobody will help you out.

(Strange? Speaking of which, did Houki pilot an IS before...?)

I tried to search through my memory. Hm, definitely never seen it before. Besides, Tabane-nee and Houki—

"I HAVE NO RELATION WITH THAT PERSON!"

Her sudden loud voice cut my thoughts like bamboo.

Looking over, the girls surrounding Houki were revealing similar expressions, not knowing what's going on.

"...Sorry for using such a loud voice. However, I'm not that person, there's nothing I can tell you."

After saying that, Houki turned her head to stare outside the window. It seemed like the girls' enthusiasm got doused, everyone was looking troubled and unhappy as they returned to their seats.

(Does Houki really hate Tabane-nee...?)

I again tried to search through my memory, and for some reason, I couldn't find any images of them being together. Speaking of which, Houki would always refuse to talk about Tabane-nee, once anyone mentions her, Houki would end the topic.

"Then, let's start the lesson. Yamada-sensei, the command."

"Ye-Yes."

Yamada-sensei seemed to be mindful of Houki as well, and from this viewpoint, she definitely looked like a professional teacher. The lesson finally started.

(I'll ask Houki later...)

Harboring these thoughts, I opened the textbook.

"Now I can be at ease. No need to worry about having to use the simulator."

Ah, is that so, Cecilia-san?

During break time, Cecilia came over to my place and said this as she placed a hand on her hip. It really doesn't matter, but you really like this posture, huh? It really doesn't matter.

"Oh my? The victor's obvious already? It's really unfair though."

"? Why do you say that?"

"Oh my, you still don't know? Alright, let me tell you, an ordinary civilian. I, as the English representative of England, Cecilia Alcott...in other words, have my own personal machine."

"Wha—"

"...Are you taking me for a fool?"

"No, although I feel that you're amazing, I don't know how amazing you are."

"Normally speaking, wouldn't you be treating me as an idiot if you're saying that?"

BAM! She slammed both hands hard onto the table. Hey, look what you have done, the notebook dropped onto the floor, idiot.

"...Ahem, wasn't it just mentioned during the lesson? There are only 467 IS in the entire world. In other words, those able to have their own personal IS are the elites among elites chosen from the 6 billion people in the entire world."

"Is, is that so..."

"That's right."

"So the current global population is already over 6 billion..."

"That's not the main point!"

PAM! Hey, idiot, now the textbook dropped on the floor, you idiot.

"I say! Are you really treating me like an idiot!?"

"No, no such thing."

"Then why are you rebutting me...?"

Huh, why so?

"Why, Houki?"

DING! With the sound, the glance flew over. Alright, the time taken was 0.8 seconds. Houki responded to me silently 'I DON'T WANT TO CARE ABOUT YOU!'.

"Speaking of which, you're Professor Shinonono's little sister, right?"

Facing Cecilia who pointed the tip of the spear at her, Houki responded with a sharp look.

"I'm just her little sister."

Hey, Houki, are you trying to scare people? It's terrifying. Look, even Cecilia's giving a "uu..." sound. What kind of delinquent are you?

"Ne-Never mind. As for whoever's suitable to be class representative, just don't forget about me, Cecilia Alcott."

Swinging her hair down with her right hand, she turned around and left. Hm—, show off a little POSE—. Even a model can do that.

"Houki."

"..."

"Shinonono-san, let's go and eat."

It's important to patch up. Because of that incident just now, there's a rift formed between Houki and the rest; as a classmate, I can't just leave it like this.

"Who's coming along?"

Got to pretend.

"Me me me!"

"I want to go—hold on a minute—"

"I made a bento, but I'll go as well!"

Oh, I got so many willing to join in for lunch. Sure is important to have a good relationship with our classmates, isn't that right, Houki?

"...I'm, not going."

"Don't say that. Come on, stand up, stand up, let's go."

"Hey, hey, I said that I'm not going—stop putting your hand behind my back like that."

Hahaha, I knew that Houki would refuse, so I made all sorts of preparations. Forcing this person along is the correct thing to do.

"What, you don't want to move? Do you want me to carry you?"

"Wha...!"

Dong, Houki blushed. For my namesake, she will come along even if she doesn't want to.

"Let, let go of me!"

"After we reach the cafeteria."

"Let, let go of me right now! Hei—"

With the elbow at center, Houki twisted my arm in order to get away. At the same time when I thought 'it hurts!', my vision got flipped and I was thrown onto the floor.

"..."

Ow, it hurts. The delayed sense of pain quickly spread throughout my back. On a side note, the surrounding girls are staring in shock.

"You've improved your technique."

"Hm, humph. You became weaker, right? This is an additional application to kendo."

Most likely, among all the girls in Japan, you're the only one who'll learn 'additional applications' in Ancient Martial arts.

"Umm, that..."

"We're still..."

"Well, never mind..."

Ah—it's rare for us to gather together, and yet the girls ran away as if it's a wild-life escape. Look what you have done, you idiot, I gathered them for Houki's sake.

"..."

After saying goodbye to the ground, I pat myself clean of the dust. Houki not only said "It's not my fault", she even folded her arms in front of her chest and looked away.

"Houki."

"I, I told you not to call me by my name—"

"Let's go eat."

I'm hungry. I forcefully grabbed Houki's hand.

"Hey, hey. Act a bit more gently, will you—"

"Just shut up and follow me."

"Uuu..."

I coldly said those words, and just then Houki obediently followed. Really, I should have done this right from the beginning, right?

Alright, we've reached the cafeteria. It's kinda crowded, but it looks like we can find seats for two.

"Houki, everything's okay, right? You'll eat something, won't you?"

"Don't treat me like a pet kitten or dog, I do have my own tastes."

"Hm—ah, I'll get two 'Meal of the day' sets. It's the salted mackerel meal set today."

"Are you listening to me at all?"

"I am. Why did you think I was so gentle and got those people to join us, idiot. You ruined it in the end. What'll happen if you can't make any friends? Your High school life will be very gloomy and boring."

"I, I don't remember...particularly asking you for this!"

"I don't remember you doing that either. Ah, aunty, two 'Meal of the day' sets. Can I leave the meal coupons here?"

I placed the meal coupons on the collection booth. I could only use my right hand right from the beginning, which was extremely inconvenient.

My left hand? Grabbing Houki and not letting her go. Most likely, this person's escape rate can rival that of a Cactuar (TL Note: Final Fantasy reference, a Cactuar's an enemy/summon)

"You know what? I wouldn't do that if any ordinary person were to ask me. It's because it's Houki that I'm doing this."

"Wha, what do you mean..."

"It's nothing. I just said hello to the aunties and told them that we're childhood friends, don't read too much into it."

"..."

Houki's gaze turned towards the ceiling, feeling silently depressed. This person, ever since I moved in with her, she got a lot more eccentric. No, seems like it has been like this since a long time ago. If I'm not careful, she'll break away from the group. That's Houki for ya.

"Th-That...thanks—"

"Here, two sets 'Meal of the day', sorry for making you wait."

"Thanks, aunty. Oh, it sure looks delicious."

"It not just the looks, it's really delicious."

Saying this, the burly canteen aunty smiled heartily. Hm, such a nice person.

"Houki, are there any empty seats?"

"..."

"Houki?"

Since she didn't reply, I turned around to look. Her facial expression was a lot uglier now.

"...There're some empty seats over there."

She shook my hand off, grabbed her own set meal and hurriedly moved off. Huh, why? Why is she angry all of a sudden?

Anyway, as I caught up to Houki, I found two empty seats in front of me.

"It's not really nice of me to say this, but,"

"...What."

Since you answered with miso soup still inside your mouth, I'll explain as I slice this grilled fish up.

"Can you teach me anything related to IS? If this keeps up, I'll lose in the battle next week without even doing anything."

"Who asked you to accept such a challenge, idiot."

Doesn't it mean despair when she says it like this?... Even though that is the case.

"Anyway, please help me in regards to this."

Holding the chopsticks and clapping them together, I begged Houki. It's a common saying that once a man has a first time, he won't feel ashamed later on. 'A man is useless if he doesn't want to win', this is the reason why I'm doing this.

"..."

Silence. I got ignored. She's not just remaining silent, she's still eating that spinach salad as well. Such a cruel person.

"As I was saying, Houki—"

"Hey, aren't you that person mentioned in the rumors?"

A girl beside me suddenly asked me. Should be a third-year. The color of the tie varies according to the year. Blue for first-years, yellow for second-years, red for third-years. The ends are gradually curled up, and this curly-hairstyle's really memorable. She looks rather approachable, like a squirrel. Oh, completely different from this childhood friend of mine who narrowed her eyes.

As expected of a third-year, the looks and even the feeling she gives is just like an adult. You see, Houki? This social language is a must for society.

"Ah, most likely."

At the same time I gave my reply, the senpai naturally sat down beside me. She folded her arms and placed them on the table, her face closing in on me.

"I heard that you're going to fight against that representative, is it true?"

"Hm, that seems to be the case."

What now? Has the rumor spread that fast? So it's true that girls are addicted to gossips and special rumors.

"But you're still an amateur, right? How long have you piloted an IS?"

"How long...I guess about 20 minutes."

"You can't win if that is the case. The key to an IS is the operation time. Your opponent's a representative, right? Then it's likely that she has exceeded 3 hours easily."

Hm—I'm not sure whether having more operational time is impressive, so I didn't really understand her words. However, she's right that I'll obviously lose to Cecilia.

"Hm, do you want me to teach you about the IS?"

The senpai (I still don't know her name) said this as she latched onto me.

Oh. How intimate. No matter who it is, it's a far cry from a childhood friend. This should be the so-called relief rain (And it just so happened that the garbage truck appeared when I wanted to throw the packaging away).

"Okay, please—"

Before I could say the words 'please help me out then', someone butted in.

"No need. I'll be teaching him anyway."

Houki, who was eating her meal, suddenly said such a thing. Huh? Is Houki going to teach me?

"You're only a first year, right? Pardon me, but I should be more suitable to teach him."

"...I, I'm Shinonono Tabane's little sister."

Houki said. It felt like she did not want to say it, but she said it reluctantly in the end.

"Even if you say Shinono—huh~?"

Once she had said it, the senpai was stunned. That was to be expected, since the younger sister of the creator of the IS was right in front of her.

"Thus, there's no need to bother you."

"Is, is that so. If that's the case, then it can't be helped... "

As expected of the world famous genius'—little sister. Anyone will be afraid when she uses that name. Actually , that affable senpai suddenly felt awkward and walked away. Ah, she was so affable.

"What."

"What do you mean...well, are you going to teach me?"

"That's just what I said."

Wouldn't it have been much faster if you had just said this right from the beginning?

Anyway, at least I've got someone teaching me now. It's practice after that then.

"Today, after school."

"Hm?"

"Come to the kendo arena later. I want to see if you've gotten rusty in your movements."

"No, what I want is the IS—"

"Just do as I say."

"...Got it."

Why is it that there are so many stubborn girls around me? Maybe it is fate. Good grief.

"What was that?"

"Well, even if you ask me that..."

After school, we were at the kendo dojo. Even though it was packed with spectators, Houki was still throwing her temper at me.

10 minutes into the scrimmage, I lost one set, and Houki raged at me as she took off her 'men'.

"Why have you become so weak?"

"Cause I was preparing for exams, I guess."

"...what club were you in during middle school?"

"Well, I was in the going home club, and I never missed a day during my three years."

Well actually, I went to work part-time to support my family.

"—Got to retrain you."

"What?"

"Retrain! This is much worse than not knowing how to pilot an IS! From now on, I'll train you for three hours, every day, after school."

"What? That's a little too long—speaking of which, it's not IS training, you know."

"That's why I said that it's an even more serious problem!"

Wah, she's rather angry. Seems like she won't listen no matter what I say.

"How miserable. Not just IS, you can't even beat a girl in kendo when you're a guy...aren't you ashamed, Ichika? "

"Well, hm... I do feel embarrassed about it."

"EMBARRASSED!? You're mindful about your own embarrassment in this situation? Or, I see, you're happy to be surrounded by so many girls!"

Pata. It's here. She's angry. No matter what, there's no reason for you to tell me off like that.

"I can't be happy at all! I'm being treated like a pet here ! Worst of all, I have to live together with a girl! What kind of tragedy is—"

"So, does that mean you're very unwilling to live with me!?"

Shua! Right at the critical moment, the bamboo sword she swung down was blocked by my own bamboo sword. Wah, hold on, you idiot. I took off my gear already! Are you trying to kill me?

"Ca-Calm down a bit, Houki. I don't want to die yet, and you aren't at the age when you can think about killing, right?"

Speaking of which, my right hand singlehandedly-blocked the full force Houki brought over, and my left hand was trembling like crazy.

"As I was saying, Houki? Please, I'll treat you next time , so let me off this time!"

"...Humph, such a spineless guy."

I finally managed to defuse this attack, as Houki glanced at me with a look of disdain before heading to the changing room.

(However...)

Houki has become stronger. In the past, I would have won easily.

My forearm that got hit was now aching. Ah, it's all swollen here...

"Orimura-kun is, well..."

"Rather weak?"

"Can he really operate an IS—"

They're the voices of despair from the spectators. Ah damn it, there's nothing more humiliating for a guy than losing to a girl.

I can't forgive myself, even more than anyone else would.

Right now, if I want to beat everyone—forget about that, I can't even protect those close to me.

I continued to sulk about it, bringing out all the feelings within me.

"...So, training's about to begin again?"

Since I'm placed in the lower rung...since I'm at the lowest, I can only work hard. I can't run away any more.

—Right, got to work hard.

Because I can't falter here.

(Maybe I was a little too harsh...)

Inside the changing room of the kendo dojo, Houki was changing her clothes. Up till now, she has been thinking the same thing over and over again.

After six years, these two childhood friends finally met each other again. Being as childish as ever and seeing the places that grew up, her heart started to race.

(No, no, that's the standard. He's normally not the kind of person who would work hard, and he clearly hasn't wielded a sword for a year, or else it wouldn't be —)

If it were the past, he wouldn't have lost to me.

"..."

Ichika has gotten stronger compared to six years ago.

And he's a lot cooler than anyone else.

(Ne-Never mind. That, erm, how can I explain it. The looks...ermm, not bad.)

Of course, he's a lot more like an adult as compared to 6 years ago. That cool looking expression alone gives the feeling that he has become a man.

(But he gave up like that. Doesn't he find it embarrassing to lose after fighting so seriously? Really.)

Thinking about it, she continued to rage, and her anger couldn't be stopped.

(What's going on with him. He was always training so seriously in the past, and now he became so wasted. So unlike a man at all!)

Normally speaking, a person who hasn't practiced kendo for three days will effectively lose a week's worth of training. That should be the case for Ichika.

It's not that he lost his skills, but his senses. Also, regaining the senses will take the longest time. The senses are gained through accumulation of experience. It's hard to gain it, but easy to lose it.

(Even so—)

Removing the scarf in her hair, her silky hair scattered and extended all the way to her waist.

(He knew all about me...)

6 years ago...it's been 6 years since they were 9 years old. Even though her face and even other parts of her body have entirely matured, it seems that the former childhood friend knew it was her before even hearing her name.

"Hoho."

This made her extraordinarily happy.

Houki recognized Ichika based on the name alone. Early on, his photo was shown on the reports. If it hadn't, she probably wouldn't even know that her childhood friend became so manly. —To be honest, she even felt that he has 'quite the build'. The moment she heard the name, the bowls in her hands dropped onto the floor.

Ichika said that he read about her winning the national championships. But those reports normally don't have any photos. However, Ichika said, 'I immediately knew'. He did say that to her.

(Does this mean that it was worth not changing my hairstyle?)

It's as if she had placed all her hope on one single minor coincidence, as if she had been hoping for a wish to be granted; more or less, it was a childish thought on her part. Besides, Houki's a youthful 15-year-old girl, so it's not unnatural for her to be cautious about romance.

"...Huh!?"

Suddenly, she saw her face in the mirror and recovered. "Ho..." She sighed, feeling rather embarrassed about that naive expression on her face as she backed off.

"..."

Though there wasn't any huge significance, she stared at herself through the mirror.

There is really no significance about this—if there's a need to mention it, it's that she's trying to hide her own embarrassment— it looked like this was the only way for Houki to regain her composure as she let out a scowl again.

(An, anyway, starting tomorrow, it'll be special training every day after school. It'll be troublesome if I don't get him back to normal standard.)

How troublesome would it be? What can be considered 'normal standard'? Though she hadn't sorted these out, Houki still folded her arms and nodded in agreement with herself.

(Besides--)

That'll mean that she has a reason to be with Ichika tomorrow.

"No! I´m not thinking of it like that!"

Right, that should be the way. There's nothing illogical about it, and there's nothing to worry about. There's nothing strange at all!

"Therefore, it's justifiable!"

In this ordinary spacious changing room, Houki, who was alone, clenched her fist as she shouted.

Week 2, Monday. The day of the match against Cecilia.

"—As I was saying, Houki."

"What now, Ichika?"

Having lived together for a week, our relationship has been restored back to such that we're calling each other by our names. Maybe the gulf of 6 years was even smaller than expected. This is good.

"Maybe I'm thinking too much."

"Really. Maybe you are."

Yes, there's still a problem that's not settled yet.

"What about my IS training?"

"..."

"Don't, you, pretend, to, be, looking, somewhere, else."

In those six days, Houki drilled me extensively on kendo. However, the problem is that that's the only thing she did.

"It, it can't be helped anyway. You don't have an IS."

"Yeah, you're right—no wait! You could have taught me all the textbook stuff and basic operations!"

"..."

"Don't, you, pretend, to, be, looking, somewhere, else."

Anyway, that's the case right now. There seems to be quite the dispute over my Personal IS, and thus, it hasn't arrived yet. That's right, as of today, it has yet to arrive.

"..."

"..."

Houki and I remained silent.

"O-Orimura-kun, Orimura-kun, Orimura-kun!"

There's no need to call my name three times. The vice homeroom teacher that I'm so familiar with, Yamada-sensei came running to the A-block seating area of the 3rd arena.

She looked like she was going to tumble at anytime as her feet movement made everyone worry for her like usual. However, she seems to be a lot hastier than usual.

"Please calm down, Yamada-sensei. Here, take a deep breath."

"Okay, breathe in~ breathe out, breathe in~ breathe out."

"Okay, stop there."

"Mm."

Sure feels like I'm doing a demonstration here. After I said that, Yamada-sensei really held her breath. After a while, her face started to turn red due to the lack of oxygen. Can't this person even tell that it's a joke?

"..."

"...Huah! Is, is it not alright?"

Hm, seems like she just doesn't know when to stop.

"You have to respect your seniors, idiot."

PANG! As usual, there was a cracking sound of impact. I would be happy enough if the pain was about

the level of a carbonated drink, but unfortunately, the force is of a heavyweight. As expected of a former representative of Japan.

"Chifuyu-nee..."

PANG!

"Call me Orimura-sensei. Remember this, or die."

Wah! You heard that? I don't think that's what an educator should say. It's because you have such a personality that you don't have a boyfriend even though you're a beauty.

"Hmph. If I didn't have to take care of this stupid brother, forget about dating, I could have already gotten married by this time."

Oh, mind reading. Any trick is useless against Chifuyu-nee.

"Th-that, there! It's here! Orimura-kun's personal IS!"

—Huh?

"Orimura, hurry up and get ready. You can only use the arena for a limited time, so make this match yours."

—What?

"It's just this level of an obstacle. If you're a man, then get past it easily, Ichika."

—Excuse me?

"Huh? Huh? Wha..."

""""HURRY UP!!""""

Yamada-sensei, Chifuyu-nee and Houki's voices overlapped each other.

The females around me were all on the same page.

Emptiness. The cargo doors of the base opened, letting out a blunt sound. The slanted, patterned fireproof doors let out a heavy opening sound. On the other side of the door, it gradually appeared in front of me.

—The 'white' is over there.

White. Snowy white. No decorations, no colours at all. The IS that was basking in pure white armor was waiting for its pilot.

"This is..."

"That's right! This is Orimura-kun's personal IS, [Byakushiki]!"[1B 1]

Snowy white and inorganic, this thing seems like it is waiting for me. That's right, like the last time; it's always been waiting. For this moment, just for this moment.

"Get moving and start mounting. We don't have much time, so format and fit all the settings during the battle from your own memory. You'll lose if you can't do it, got it?"

Being prompted, I touched the IS.

"Strange..."

I didn't get the electric shock-like feeling of touching the IS like I did during the exam, merely common knowledge and understanding. What it is, why it exists—I understood it all.

"Lean on your back. Yes, just like that. You'll feel like you're sitting down. Next, the system will optimize itself. "

Like what Chifuyu-nee said, I left my body to the IS with the opened armor—Byakushiki. It feels like someone's riding on me as the armor fits to my body and closes up.

The sound of air being let out can be heard as the union of the armor feels like it's a part of my body. It feels like it fused with me, as if it became compatible with me. It was created for me in the first place, so Byakushiki and I are 'linked'.

It feels like my vision widened and got clearer, like a higher resolution. After that, the feeling spread throughout my entire body. Values spread throughout all the sensors on my body, and I could understand each and every one of them as if I've been staring at them everyday.

"Ah."

—Sensing an IS in standby mode, the pilot's name is Cecilia Alcott, the IS codename is 'Blue Tears', it's a long-ranged type suit, and has a unique armor—

"The high spec IS sensors are functioning well, right? Ichika, are you feeling okay?"

Chifuyu-nee looked as usual, but I could sense it from her voice—ah, is she worried about me?

"No, Chifuyu-nee. I'm alright."

"I see."

She sounds like she's assured. If not for the hi-specs of the IS sensors, I wouldn't even be able to sense those hidden feelings.

(But since she already called my name, I should have sensed it, right?)

I secretly focused my consciousness on Houki. My eyes didn't need to look over directly, since through the IS, I could 'see everything' 360 degrees around me.

"..."

All I could see was that she was trying to say something, but she obviously didn't know what she wanted to say. If it were the usual me, I wouldn't be able to sense this change either.

"Houki."

"Wh-What?"

"I'm going."

"Ah...mm, win and come back!"

I nodded my head in response and headed towards the gateway of the control room. After bending down slightly, the Byakushiki lightly floated in the air and flew forward.

Clak *clak* *clak* *clak* *clak*,

Behind the clear consciousness of mine, the Byakushiki was processing tons of data and formatted the primary settings in accord to my body. Even during this current second, the surface of the Byakushiki's continuing to

change and shape itself. As the software and hardware were both updating, the values shown have reached an extent to such that I've never seen them before.

Even so, now's not the time to notice this background. There's still 2.05718422 seconds before the doors open—and the 'enemy' awaits there.

"Oh my, so you didn't run away."

Cecilia snorted as she placed her hand on her hip, giving off that princess vibe again.

However, I'm not mindful about that. The sensors won't bother about such things.

The bright blue machine 'Blue Tears' has the unique characteristic of four rear fin armors on the back, making it look as royal as a knight.

The pilot, Cecilia, was wielding the large 2m long gun—a search indicated that it was identical to a six or seven caliber unique laser gun 'Starlight MkIII'. As the IS was originally developed for space activity, in principle, it'll float in the sky. Thus, it was not strange for her to wield a weapon that was taller than she is.

The arena was 200m in diameter, and the estimated time for a fired shot to reach the target was about 0.4 seconds. The bell indicating the start of the match has already rung, so it was not strange for an attack to come anytime now.

"I'll give you one last chance."

Cecilia moved the hand that was on her hip and pointed her index finger at me, and the muzzle of her rifle casually pointed downwards.

"Chance?"

"It's obvious that I'll be winning no matter what. Thus, if you don't want to end up being seen in a battered and pathetic state, I may as well forgive you if you apologize now."

Having said that, she narrowed her eyes at me—warning, enemy IS pilot's left eye is in firing mode. Confirmed to have removed safety lock.—

I received all the information the IS told me and sorted myself out. If I don't do so, I might be swallowed up in an instant—whether by Cecilia or by Byakushiki.

"That chance isn't yours to give, right?"

"Really? That's a pity. If so—"

—Warning. Enemy IS is entering a firing posture. Trigger has been confirmed to be squeezed, the first energy shot is loaded.

"It's farewell with this!"

Clank! With this unique ear-rumbling sound, the flash instantly pierced through my body.

"Oh?"

The Byakushiki's auto defense system seemed to have protected my body. Though I avoided a direct hit, bits of debris started to fall off the left shoulder that was not fully fitted. After that, the slightly slower sonic boom nearly ripped away at my left arm, as my nerves reacted like an electric shock.

As the Byakushiki immediately booted itself to drag my arm back, I managed to end up without any blood loss. Though there was an anti-vertigo function which allowed me to not lose consciousness, I did feel a really uncomfortable gravity.

—Defensive armor was pierced. Damage: 46. Shield Energy remaining: 521. Actual damage: Low.

(Damn it! I can't follow the reactions of the Byakushiki!)

Basically, in an IS battle, one will win if the opponent's shield energy fall to 0. However, if that happens, once the armor's pierced through, there'll be actual damage. This is different from the numerical defensive capabilities, the damage locations, no matter how big or small, will end up affecting the battle.

On a side note, in order not to let the pilot die, the IS seem to have an 'absolute defense' ability. It can block any attack, but will drastically reduce the defensive energy—since this is what the textbook wrote, it should be right, right? As it was a hit on the shoulder, the IS did not use the 'absolute defense', probably thinking that 'it's alright even if it's blown away'.

"Now, let's dance. Dance to the waltz that Cecilia Alcott and Blue Tears are playing!"

A shot, and another, and another, and another. The attacks continued to rain down on me, and they were all

shot precisely, so I couldn't dodge them all. The shield energy continued to drop, and the Byakushiki continued to let out the alert signal.

"Weapon. What's its weapon!?"

Immediately after asking this, the current weapon checklist showed itself—the checklist?

"There's only one..."

It showed itself. There was only something called a ' close combat sword'. Sigh, this may be my imagination ... sigh.

"Well, at least it's better than nothing!"

At least it's better than fighting barehanded! I drew the close combat sword 'name unspecified' and used it.

Clang...

With the high frequency sound, my right shoulder let out a ball of light. The ball shaped itself, and my hand ended up holding it.

This sword, this 1.6m long 'sword' is my weapon.

"Using a close ranged weapon to challenge me in a long-ranged type suit...what a joke!"

Cecilia immediately launched her attack. Though I managed to slightly dodge it, the distance between me and the opponent was a staggering 27m. To me right now, it's basically a few kilometers worth of distance. However—

"Looks like I can only fight on!"

I can't admit defeat. The intense battle starts here.

"—27 minutes. You've really hung in there. I'll give you credit for that."

"Thanks..."

My shield energy are down to 67, and the actual damage is medium. Though I'm barely using my weapon , it's just 'barely'.

"You're the first person I've seen who has managed to hang on that long against Blue Tears."

After saying that, Cecilia looked as if she was praising a dog that has managed to chase down a Frisbee as she stroked the four independent mobile weapons that floated around her.

On one of the board like things, there was a BT laser muzzle directly installed on it. That weapon seems to have a complicated name, so it's called 'Blue Tears'.

...In other words, this IS became a first unit after these unique armaments called 'Blue Tears' were equipped on it, and thus, the unit was named after it. In the past 27 minutes, Cecilia has been rattling on even though I didn't say anything. Got to thank her for her explanation.

"But let's bring this to an end!"

Cecilia chuckled as she raised her right arm. And then, two Blue Tears received the commands—it's too troublesome explaining them, but the BIT-like things come flying at me from multiple angles.

"Ku...!"

The BITs that have come to surround me from above and below started to glow on their tips and fired out lasers. Once I barely try to block them or even dodge them, Cecilia will use this opportunity to fire her rifle. Anyway, this has always been the case.

"I'm taking your left leg!"

—Damn it! That part has already lost its armor, so if it's attacked, the 'absolute defense' will definitely be activated. Therefore, the shield energy will drop to 0, and I'll lose.

If that is the case, I'll give it a go—

"AHHH!!"

CLANG!! A loud sound could be heard, and for an instant, sparks flew. While forcing myself to accelerate, my body slammed into Cecilia's rifle, forcing the rifle to be knocked aside, and at least I've finally managed to avoid being hit, at least once.

"What...? You're really just messing around! However, this is just futile resistance!"

Cecilia pulled her distance away from me and swept her left hand across. With that, the 4 BITs that were on standby came flying at me.

—Good, so now I understand.

Getting past the lasers that can pierce through humans , the sword strikes, and I can feel the heavy metal being sliced in half.

The blue and white sparks danced on the BIT that was sliced in half, and it exploded a second later—one down.

"How did you?"

Facing the shocked Cecilia, I swung the sword downward.

"Uuu..."

Cecilia dodged the attack that came from behind and again waved her right hand. BITs 2 and 3 were deployed.

"These weapons will only move on your commands! Also—"

After investigating the routes, I destroyed the rear boosters of BIT2 to make it fall.

"At that moment, you can't launch any other attacks, because you have to concentrate in order to use them, right?"

"...!"

Cecilia's right eyebrow twitched a bit. Heh, I've nailed it right on the spot! There're only two BITs left, and I can already tell where they're going. They'll definitely come to attack me from an angle where my reaction will be the slowest.

The IS vision field is perfect. However, the humans who use it can't 'look' behind, below and above simultaneously, so when our brain processes the information, the response will be slower by a few seconds. Cecilia must be aiming for this chance to attack. On the other hand, it means that 'I can lure the enemy to attack from where I want it to be'. The logic is simple, I just need to create an opening and let the opponent attack from there, and just wait for it.

(--That will work! I just need to concentrate here.)

I gripped the sword in my right hand again. The training after school that I did with Houki has become unexpectedly useful. The basic of kendo is to strike, and I didn't lose the feeling I've gained from my multiple experiences in the past, even though I've become slower.

And is it my imagination? The IS is moving more agilely. Normally speaking, the more damage the IS has, the functions should decrease, but for some reason, I feel that the response is a lot faster than what it was at the beginning.

(Anyway, if I can close the distance down, I'll have the advantage.)

As what Cecilia declared, her IS is a long-ranged type, and in a distance suitable for close-ranged combat, that large and long rifle is completely useless. And from what I see, she doesn't have any close range equipment.

Even though such equipment might be 'on standby', but even so, since the distance is being reduced extremely quickly, she shouldn't be able to deploy them in time.

This little ray of hope caused my heart to race.

"Ooh...Orimura-kun's amazing!"

Yamada Maya exclaimed while watching the live broadcast on the screen inside the control room. Truly, the way Ichika is fighting doesn't look like one who has just mounted an IS for his second time at all.

However, compared to Yamada, Chifuyu looked rather irritated.

"That idiot sure looks happy."

"Wh? How do you know?"

"He has been clenching his left hand all this time, right ? That's a habit he has had since he was young. When this happens, he'll start to make very simple mistakes.

"Wha...to be aware of that, you two really are siblings!"

Maya just casually mentioned it, but Chifuyu was stunned for a second.

"Ye-Yeah, how should I say it...even if he's like that, he's still my brother..."

"Ah—are you embarrassed? Are you embarrassed?"

"..."

CRRRAACCCKKK!! The headlock exploded.

"OOWWWWWW!!!"

"The one thing I hate the most is to be made fun of."

"Yes, yes! I know, I know! So please let go of—OWWWW!!!"

Houki was completely unaware of the commotion Maya was making behind her, staring intently at the screen. For some reason, her expression started to look really scary.

"..."

She wasn't making any praying gesture; Houki isn't the kind of person who would do that.

And thus, because of that, this expression of hers had many feelings within it.

(Ichika...)

While Houki was biting her lip lightly, the battle situation started to change again.

—Got her.

Having entered Cecilia's range, I swung my sword to destroy BIT3, and because of the zero gravity mechanism of the IS, I kicked BIT4 away.

The rifle couldn't aim at me in time, and so this would be a good chance to land a hit on her.

"—I got you."

I see Cecilia smirk—damn it! My basic instincts detect danger and tell me to pull away, but it's already too late.

PAM—

The skirt-shaped like armor spread from Cecilia's abdomen, and those parts that suddenly rose up started to move.

"I'm sorry, but there're six Blue Tears!"

I can't dodge them in time! And they're not those laser shooting BITs. These are 'auto-tracking' types.

BAM—!

The explosion got so red that it became white as it surrounded me.

"ICHIKA...!"

Watching the broadcast, Houki suddenly shouted out.

Chifuyu and Maya, who were squabbling about just now, looked serious as they stared at the screens' image, that was covered with black smoke.

"—Humph."

While the black smoke scattered, Chifuyu let out a snort. However, she looked as if everything was okay.

"You got saved by the machine, you idiot."

The smoke that vaguely floated around scattered as if it crumbled.

And the pure white machine was right in the middle of it.

That's right, it's true appearance—

—Formatting and optimizing of settings are complete, please press the button to confirm.

(What, what now...?)

The information was sent directly to my consciousness . At the same time, a window appeared in front of me, with a 'confirm' button right in the middle.

Without knowing anything, I pressed the button. After that, a large wealth of information came flowing into me.

—No wait, this should be processed information—

I could understand this based on the feeling. After that , a huge transformation occurred in me.

CLANG...!

It's a high frequency sound. However, I feel the gentleness within it.

At that moment, my body got wrapped—no, the light ball that appeared on my IS instantly disappeared and then reshaped itself.

"This is..."

The newly-shaped IS again let out a dim glow. This glow erased all the damage I got just now and refined the appearance of the suit.

"Don-Don't tell me...that's the First Shift? This means, this means that you were fighting with the initial settings right from the beginning!?"

The window that showed 'formatting' and 'settings optimized' seem to mean that.

If so, this is my real suit.

I looked at my suit. Those constructive curves that were there in the beginning were now gone, instead becoming one with the polished curves and sharp edges, giving the feeling of a medieval designed armor.

And then, what had changed the most was my weapon.

—Close ranged enhanced sword [Yukihira Nigata][1B 2].

The blade that seemed to be derived from a Japanese sword. Instead of a sword, it was more of an arched longsword. There was a shallow groove on the blade itself, and it revealed a glow that seemed to respond. From the intricate mechanical function, one could tell that it was definitely made for an IS.

And most importantly, the name.

—Yukihira. That's the name of the weapon that Chifuyu-nee once used. At that time, the sword-shaped weapon that she used was called Yukihira.[1B 3]

...Ahh, this is so touching.

"I really have the best sister in the world..."

No matter whether it's three years ago or six years ago or even fifteen years ago, that person is still my always-reliable sister. However, it's about time for me to end this one-sided protection. From today onwards—

"I'll be the one to protect my family."

"...Ah? What're you saying—"

"Anyway, first of all, I'll defend Chifuyu-nee's name!"

I'm the younger brother of the ex-representative of Japan, so if this brother is weak, it'll be too embarrassing! That's right, how can I let the cool Chifuyu-nee lose her face? Even if it's a joke, there has to be a limit. Besides, this isn't funny at all.

"More like I'll be mocked."

"What are you rambling about...ahh geez, you're too irritating!"

The two BITs again reloaded themselves with guided missiles, and under Cecilia's command, they started to fly over. It's those multi-angle paths again, and they're faster than the shooting type BITs. However—

(I can see them...!)

I clenched my right hand tightly. 'Yukihira' seemed to respond to me as it let out a deep mechanical sound. I know how to use it, since I watched a few of Chifuyu-nee's matches without her knowing, and I remember how she used the 'Yukihira'.

CLANG—!

The blade of light flashed, and the BITs that were cut in half moved forward due to the momentum, passing by me before exploding.

Before the explosion reached my back, I again attacked Cecilia. The suit instantly accelerated, and the sensor efficiency was a lot different from before, such that it was easy to control it.

"OOOOHHH!!"

I felt the energy intensity in my hand gradually increasing. At that moment, Yukihira's blade glowed, telling me that it has a tremendous power.

(I can win this...!)

Charging right at Cecilia, I let out a reverse kesagiri[1B 4].

—But, before it could hit her, the buzzer signaled the end of the match.

"Ending the match. Winner—Cecilia Alcott."

...Wha?

"That's strange...?"

My face was most likely filled with 'whys'. Facing me, Cecilia was the same, as her slightly opened mouth revealed a similar expression to mine.

And not just us, all the spectators in the 3rd arena, even Houki and Yamada-sensei, who were watching the match from the control room silently, were the same. Everyone was just shocked.

Only one person...only Chifuyu-nee was giving the ' can't stand you' look.

In these unknown circumstances, the match ended. The result is—I lost.

"Everyone was actually praising you, and this is the outcome we got in return! You big idiot!"

After the match ended, I was upgraded from an idiot to a big idiot. This upgrade wouldn't make me happy at all. Chifuyu-nee's style sure is to not relegate me like this.

"It's because you didn't consider the special characteristics of the weapon before you used it. Now you have experienced it for yourself already, right? From

tomorrow onwards, start working hard. Activate the IS when you have time, got it?"

"...Yes."

I nodded. Guess I could only do that...who asked me to lose despite acting so confident.

"Well, the IS is in standby mode now, but if Orimura-kun calls it, it'll deploy right away. However, there're rules to this, so please study it closely. Here, this is it."

Thud. It made a 'thud' just now. What's this in front of me? Though it has IS activation information on it, it's actually a 'phone directory', right? It's not just thick, the pages are so thin...how many pages are there anyway...

"Anyway, that's it for today. Head back and rest."

This order doesn't consider anyone's feelings at all. I really hope that she can learn from gentle medicine and painkillers. Speaking of which, do I really need to protect this person...?

"Let's go."

Oh, she appeared; another person who lacks gentleness. Her name is Houki, and she's my childhood friend.

I stood up tiredly and prepared to head back to the dorm.

"..."

"Wha-What?"

While walking together, Houki stared at me without turning away. Did she discover some treasure? This treasure called 'me'.

"Loser."

Huh? What's with her!? You're like a priest who lets a dead person revive with 1HP before sending him into a labyrinth, right? On a side note, that revival was a daylight robbery! As the common saying goes: 'the devil resides within everyone'. I didn't expect to witness that illustration first hand.

This should be a new scenario: enter a new chapter, and the plot starts to pummel like crazy, creating a shocking situation. The enemy again shows up as an ally,

and the enemy in front turns out to be a dead assistant. The world's fate rests on you—no wait, don't come near me!

"DON'T COME NEAR ME!"

"What?"

"Nothing..."

As that's the main point, I repeated it twice, but since Houki's glaring at me, I better be content with this. 'The most important things are the parts where the human eyes can't reach'. This is something an author casually said before, so 'since I got glared at by Houki, the 9th of April is Houki's memorial day'—something like that.

"Are you making fun of me from within your heart?"

"Where did you get that from."

"Why is your tone so weird?"

"It not weird at all. This is normal, it's normal to speak like this in middle South America."

"Ohh..."

She really drew the wooden sword out quickly. What, are you going to swing your sword around over here? Such a strict fellow. But then, Houki, training the body is different from resting! I can't call it resting if I have to carry out some activity.

BAM—!

"OOOOWWWW!!! IT HURTS! YOU, YOU, WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?"

"Since there's an idiot here, I just knocked on him."

What's with that 'I'm holding an umbrella because it's raining' tone? Is it alright for you to keep using violence like that? What's wrong with Japan's security!?

"Are you that thing? The vegetable chopper, or are you the envoy of violence!?"

"Want me to go again?"

"...Sorry, I'll shut up."

With a 'mm', Houki keeps her bamboo sword back. She's scarier than Mount Osore...huh, but Mount Osore isn't really terrifying. (Literally meaning Mount Fear, it's

a volcano in the center of the remote Shimokita Peninsula of Aomori Prefecture, Japan. The Bodai Temple near the crater lake is seen as one of the three great spiritual fields .)

"..."

"..."

Houki and I silently walked on. Though it's not that we have nothing to talk about, I'm really affected by today's defeat, and so I have nothing to say to Houki.

At this moment, what I really want to do the most is to take a shower. I think that the feeling that comes from lazing around in the bathtub can't be found in any other activity. I did mention this to Gotanda before, only to be told 'you're like an old man'. Really, he doesn't understand the beauty of a silent simplicity.

(Hm? Speaking of which, don't I have someone like that beside me?)

If it's Houki, she may be able to understand that feeling. Besides, if I were to introduce her as someone from the Edo period, 60% of the foreigners would believe me. The source of this information: me.

"Ichika."

"Hm, what's up?"

That's strange, she's actually talking to me. Is this the so-called telepathy? How convenient, this is so much more convenient than a handphone, and I don't have to pay monthly bills. How alluring.

"That, well, how should I say it...are you unhappy about losing?"

"Well, of course I am."

"Is, is that so? That's good..."

Since when is that good? Are you talking about me losing? You're too much!

"Ah, s-starting tomorrow...that...ah, you have to do IS training."

Continuing with the talk, for some reason, didn't her voice sound rather courteous? Or was it distraught...

"So, in the end, Houki's gonna teach me how to control an IS, right?"

"I, I don't intend to force you! Wouldn't you prefer Chifuyu-sensei to teach you?"

"No, Chifuyu-nee would find it bothersome, and I don't want people to misinterpret it as favoritism."

"How, how about getting a senpai to teach you? As they say, the seniors can teach you lots of things, and it's important to improve yourself."

Seems like instead of trying to change the topic, Houki's been trying to divert it to somewhere strange. And I have no idea if it's just me, but why is she glancing at me? It seems like she's waiting for something.

"Mm, since Houki doesn't want to, I'll just look for someone—"

"I, I DIDN'T SAY THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO!"

I got terrified at her, shouting out all of a sudden. Houki seemed to notice that she got too fierce, as she immediately pulled herself together.

"That, that...ahem, I-Ichika, do you want me to teach you...?"

"That's right."

At least it's easier than having to get other girls to teach me, and she's Tabane-san's little sister, so she should be able to understand ISs pretty well, right?

"Is, is that so...hoho, I see. I guess it can't be helped."

Why is she so happy all of a sudden? Did something good happen?

She seemed to be extremely happy as she again started playing with her hair, continuing to flick her long ponytail apart with her fingers.

"Alright, I'll teach you then. This is a special exception!
"

For some reason, it felt like she emphasized the words 'special exception' quite a bit.

But that's right. Truthfully, I'm really grateful for that. If I were to continue losing to girls, my man's pride would definitely die. Though it's already half dead, when that happens, it'll be completely dead.

"Starting tomorrow, make sure to leave some time after school, okay?"

"Okay."

Since I have no clubs that I can join (they're all girls' clubs), this is perfect.

Basically, I can't stand having to smear Chifuyu-nee's reputation like that. No matter what, I have to make myself stronger.

"Oh yeah, Houki."

"Hm, what is it?"

Oh, she's still in a good mood. I then gave an honest question I've been harboring up till now.

"Have you been holding yourself from going to the bathroom all this time?"

BAM—! The bamboo sword let out a sound.

Drip *drip* *drip* *drip* *drip*...

The hot water continued to spurt out from the shower head. The water landed on her skin and flowed down the curves of her body. Her well-proportioned body that was rare among Caucasians and her beautiful streamlines, to Cecilia, were something to be really proud of. Those long legs were shiny, silky and beautiful, and they could not only compete with those of an idols, but would most likely even beat them in beauty.

Though her breasts were a little smaller, compared to other white girls of the same age, it made her body profile stand out even more. Thus, she had some rather complicated feelings because of them. However, that was just for white girls. If they were compared to a Japanese girls', they were more than enough, enough to even be called big.

Cecilia continued to let the water rush down her breasts as she pondered deep in thought.

(Today's match—)

Even now, she didn't understand why Ichika's shield energy dropped to 0. However, if he had struck her with that last hit, it was unknown what would have happened .

To Cecilia, who had always believed that she would win, and would constantly strive for it, this bewilderment made her unable to calm down.

(I definitely won...)

But she wasn't satisifed by it at all; on the contrary, it made her feel uneasy.

(—Orimura, Ichika—)

She still remembered the guy with those strong-willed eyes.

That not-giving-up look often reminded Cecilia of her own father.

(Daddy would always go according to mommy's whims...)

Having married into a wealthy family, her dad must have felt extremely inferior to her mother. And having such a father during her growth, Cecilia inadvertently thought 'I don't want to marry such a useless man'.

And after the IS was rolled out, her dad's attitude got increasingly sulkier. Her mom must have felt that such a man was a disappointment, so she didn't want to talk to him.

"..."

Her mom was already an impressive woman. Before the society became a women-strong-men-weak society, she had already managed numerous companies, and was an accomplished person. Though she was extremely strict, Cecilia had always respected her a lot.

Yes, 'had'. Her parents are no longer alive. They died in an accident 3 years ago.

Why were her parents, who had been working separately, together on that particular day? Up till now, she still doesn't know the reason.

Though there were once rumors of some conspiracies, the scenario of that accident removed that possibility. It

was a cross-border railway accident with more than a hundred causalities.

Just like that, her parents became people who won't ever come back.

After that, time flew.

Cecilia had a vast inheritance, and in order to protect the money from those who wanted to laud it, she studied hard to learn everything, and during an IS suitability test that was part of her learning curriculum, she got an A+ grade. Hoping that she would maintain her nationality, the government came up with all sorts of generous conditions; and in order to protect her parents' inheritance, she immediately agreed. Cecilia was chosen to be the first test pilot of the 3rd generation armament ' Blue Tears'. In order to obtain operation informations and battle experience, she came to Japan, and then—

She met Orimura Ichika; she met the ideal man who had such firm looking eyes.

"Orimura, Ichika..."

She tried to shout his name out. Unbelievably, she could even feel her chest heat up.

Her heart was pounding without any restraint. Cecilia gently stroked her lips. Those pretty, wet lips stirred an unbelievable excitement like they desired to be touched.

"..."

Warm and sweet, saddening yet delighting.

—What's with this feeling?

Before she knew it, her chest was already overwhelmed with this feeling.

—I want to know.

She wants to know its true identity, she wants to know what's behind this feeling.

—I want to know. I want to know, about Ichika.

"..."

Only the sound of water flowing echoed throughout the bathroom.

The next morning during, the SHR, something unbelievable happened.

"Then, the class representative of 1-1 will be Orimura Ichika-kun. Ah, it sure is nice to have a '1'[1B 5] for everything!"

Yamada-sensei said delighted, and the girls showed a strong reaction to this. I was the only one in the dark... just me alone.

"Sensei, I have a question."

I raised my hand. Basically, I have to raise my hand if I want to ask a question.

"Please say, Orimura-kun."

"I definitely lost the match yesterday, so why did I still become the class representative?"

"That's because—"

"That's because I gave up on it!"

Cecilia forcefully stood up and quickly put her hands on her hips. She's giving that ojou-sama vibe again. No, actually, I'm not really thinking about that now—more importantly—why did she resign? And she seems rather emotional...no wait, she's always like that...however, how should I say it? She doesn't seem as angry as yesterday. She seems to be feeling rather happy however—why?

"Hm, Even though you lost, that was to be expected, since your opponent was this Cecilia Alcott, so it couldn't be helped that you lost!"

Uu...I can't argue back, since I really lost.

"Besides, I have reflected on my actions for being unable to control myself. So..."

So?

"I decided to hand over the class representative position to 'Ichika-san'. For IS piloting, having practical fights is the best way to improve. So, If you become the class representative, you will have lots of battles."

Ooh, thanks for giving me this burden—hm? That's weird. Did she call me by my name?

"Ooh, Cecilia's really professional!"

"That's right. Since he's the sole male in the world and in the same class, we have to support him—"

"We can gain valuable experiences and sell the information to other classes. Orimura-kun's presence here can kill two birds with one stone!"

Didn't I tell you not to do business already? Don't sell your classmate out like that.

"Therefore—"

After coughing a few times to clear her throat, Cecilia placed her hand on her chin. This is different from what she normally does; is there a special significance to this? I feel that there's something, but just don't know what it is.

"Also, if this outstanding, graceful, elegant and perfect person that I am, were to teach you how to pilot an IS, you would definitely imp—"

BAM! With the sound of the table being slammed, Houki stood up.

"Sorry, but Ichika already has an instructor. He already asked me directly!"

Wha, what's going on? Houki actually emphasized the 'me' as she glared at Cecilia with intense killing intent.

(Didn't I tell you that those eyes can scare anyone!?)

—But for some reason, Cecilia, who was afraid of her just last week, now behaved completely different. She took Houki's glare head on and stared back, looking rather satisfied.

"Oh my, IS grade C Shinonono-san? Is there anything you want to talk to this grade A me about?"

"This..., this has nothing to do with level! I was requested. I-Ichika begged me earnestly for this!"

I didn't.

"Huh, Houki's grade C...?"

"That, that's why I said that it has nothing to do with level, right!?"

I got scolded. Well, on a side note, it seems like I got the grade B. Even so, Chifuyu-nee did say before that this is the initial ranking that's obtained from the training suit , so it's not really significant—

"Sit down, you pair of idiots."

Chifuyu-nee quickly walked over and smacked down on Cecilia and Houki's heads as she swiftly went to them.

As expected of the Japanese representative in the first Mondo Grosso, the dreadfulness is on a completely different scale. Both of them could only sit down dejectedly. Dreadful and dejected[1B 6], it's really interesting to combine these two things together.

BAM!

"WHAT ARE YOU BEING ALL CARRIED AWAY ABOUT!? BUCK UP!"

I got hit by the attendance book. Chifuyu-nee, do you know that the cover of the attendance book is really hard ? However, only I know that.

"Your level's like that of trash. The way I see it, each one of you are flocks of a feather. Don't show your superiority before you break through your shells."

Regarding Chifuyu-nee's words, it seemed like even Cecilia couldn't argue back. Though it seemed like she had something to say about it, she swallowed her words in the end.

"I should have mentioned before that even representative candidates have to learn everything, starting from the beginning. Though I would say that it's a youth's privilege to bicker over something trivial, unfortunately for you people, I'm in charge, so you better respect yourselves more."

Hm—so Chifuyu-nee's such a reliable person in her profession? That's really unexpected. She doesn't seem to be the kind of person who always complains that the food tastes bland.

Speaking of which, since I'm living in the dorm now, how will Chifuyu-nee turn the house around? No one will be in the house, right? Seems like I'll have to go back on weekends. Speaking of which, has Chifuyu-nee been doing her laundry properly? She has always asked me to help her wash her laundry when I'm washing mine. However, it would be great if she threw those underwear-like clothes into the laundry net. If she were to wash them together and damage the fabric, she would be the one angry. You should do that yourself, you 24-year-old member of society.

PAM!

"...You're thinking of something rude, right?"

"No...Not at all."

"Is that so?"

PAM! *PAM!*

"I'm very sorry!"

"Good that you know."

A kind citizen actually succumbed to violence? This defies all logic!

"The class representative will be Orimura Ichika. No one has any objections, right?"

"Nope", everyone (except for me) replied. Unity is a good thing.

However, it would be great if it was also good for me. That's what I think.

Chapter 3: The Transfer Student is the Second Childhood Friend

"Well then, let's start practicing some basic IS maneuvers. Orimura, Alcott, try flying with your ISs."

It was near the end of April, the time when the late-blooming Sakura petals were falling. Today, I'm seriously learning from the instructor from hell called Chifuyu-nee.

"Hurry up! A properly trained pilot doesn't need more than a second to deploy the IS."

After being prompted, I started to concentrate.

Once the IS is optimized, it will remain with the pilot in the form of a decoration. Cecilia's is an earring on her left ear, and mine is an arm guard...no wait, they're mostly decorations, but mine's a defense tool, right? Why is it?

"You better concentrate!"

Damn it, I'll get beaten up next time.

I stretched my right arm out, and used my left hand to grab it. After many tries, I found out that this pose allows me to concentrate best—or rather, it allows me to imagine deploying my IS best.

(Come out! [Byakushiki]!)

I muttered in my heart. At that moment, I felt a thin layer extend from my right wrist over my entire body. The time it took to deploy was about 0.7 seconds. The balls of light scattered out from my body before seemingly combining together to form the IS.

My body instantly became lighter, and all sorts of sensors started being linked to my consciousness, which raised my line of sight. In the blink of an eye, my body was equipped with the IS [Byakushiki] and was floating about 10cm above the ground.

Cecilia was also equipped with her own IS [Blue Tears] as she floated. The BITs that were destroyed by me during our battle were already completely repaired.

"Okay, fly."

After Chifuyu-nee said that, Cecilia immediately got into action. She quickly rose up and stopped high above the ground.

Though I managed to do it as well, my speed of ascent was much slower than Cecilia's.

"What are you doing? In terms of specs, [Byakushiki] has a higher power output!"

A lecture could be heard from the communication line. On a side note, I've only just learned how to do an emergency ascent and descent, and that the method of piloting is to 'push in the direction I imagine'. However, I just can't grasp that feeling.

"Ichika-san, imagination is just imagination. You should find a more suitable image for yourself!"

"Even if you say that, I can't really understand it. Basically, this feeling of flying through the air is still strange to me. How can this thing even fly?"

Though the [Byakushiki] does have two pairs of wings , if I think of it like this, it can't possibly fly like a plane does. Basically, since the theory of flying is unrelated to

the direction the wings spread, it can fly in any directions , which makes me wonder what is going on.

"I wouldn't mind explaining it, but there's a lot to it. This includes the anti-gravity wings and the theory of flow interference."

"I know, you don't need to explain it to me."

I immediately refused. My brain definitely can't process all of that.

"Is that so? What a pity. Hoho."

Cecilia revealed a delighted smile, and it was neither a ridiculing, nor a courteous one. It was just a normal, happy smile.

Ever since that match, she seems to always have a reason to train me, which I'm really grateful for. Also, as expected of a representative candidate, she's really outstanding.

However, how much has her mindset changed? Her initial attitude seems to be a lie or something.

"Ichika-san, if you want to, I can teach you after school. We'll be alon—"

"ICHIKA! HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP FLYING UP THERE!? HURRY UP AND GET DOWN!"

An angry shout could be heard from the communicator. Looking closely, far far below on the ground was Houki, who snatched the speaker from Yamada-sensei, while looking completely flustered. On a side note, my vision could be compared to that of a telescope, and it was all due to the IS high-grade sensors. I could see everything clearly from 200 m above the ground. If this sort of ability were to be used for something bad, it could really create quite a lot of trouble !

"Let me add on a bit, right now, the sensors are still limited. The IS was originally intended for space activity, and since the IS has to grasp objects at a distance of tens of thousands kilometers, it's to be expected that we can see so many small things at this distance, so clearly."

As expected of a model student, to be so knowledgeable on such stuff. On a side note, Houki's explanation was like:

"Like a 'mm' feeling."

"With a 'dong' touch."

"And also with a 'clang' mode."

Her explanation was completely useless to me. Speaking of which, did Houki really activate an IS just like that? I haven't really started practicing how to pilot an IS, so I didn't ask how far Houki had gone with that.

On another side note, Cecilia would always rebut Houki's explanations, and then both of them would start to squabble. If so, she's soft to me, yet antagonistic to Houki. Why is that?

"Orimura, Alcott, try doing a sudden dive and then come to a complete halt. The target is 10cm above the ground."

"R-Roger. In that case, I'll be going first."

After saying that, Cecilia immediately dropped towards the floor. I was somewhat impressed as I watched her become smaller.

"You're good, aren't you?"

Just like that, she seemed to have completely stopped perfectly—okay, time for me to go down.

I gathered my concentration as an image of a rocket cannon firing from my wings formed in my mind; after focusing on that, I instantly dived down to the ground.

Whoosh—DHUMP!!

I landed. However, to an expert, it would seem more like a crash. My body didn't hit the ground too hard due to the anti-gravity function, but my heart nearly got killed by my classmates' laughter. If possible, I hope that the IS could protect my heart as well.

"You idiot. Who asked you to open a hole in the ground?"

"...Sorry."

Anyway, I got a hold of myself, and rose from the ground. Thanks to the IS shields, the [Byakushiki] didn't get dirty.

"You're embarrassing! Ichika, have you forgotten what I taught you yesterday?"

Giving me a cold stare, Houki folded her arms in front of her chest as she waited for me there. What you 'taught me yesterday'...don't tell me you are talking about those weird noises? Houki can actually tell a joke! Hm, so having a change in perspective is a good thing.

"You're definitely thinking something rude right now, aren't you?"

Why is it that others can read my mind?

"Basically Ichika, ever since the past, you've been—"

Just when I thought that Houki was going to continue to rattle on, someone actually appeared in front of me and interrupted her.

"Ichika-san, are you alright? Are you hurt?"

"O-Oh, I'm alright..."

"Is that so? That's great."

Hohoho, Cecilia again laughed happily. Uu—a girl's emotions just change when they want to. I really want to ask, who it was that said that 'a girl's feelings are like an autumn's sky'? Isn't it even more unpredictable than the weather?

"...How could he possibly be injured when he is equipped with an IS..."

"Ah, Shinonono-san, isn't it normal to be concerned about others? Even if he's equipped with an IS, this is common sense, right?"

"You're one to talk, you wolf in sheep clothing."

"Well, it's better than donning the clothes of a demon."

BOOM! Both glared at each other, creating many sparks...no, even though they're not creating sparks, for some reason, I'm seeing them. Is it because of the IS sensors? If that's the case, even though it's amazing, it's not hard to think that this is something useless. Speaking of which, the relationship between these two seems to be on even worse terms, I wonder why?

"Hey you, idiots, don't block the way. If you want to quarrel, go somewhere else!"

Forcefully pushing Houki and Cecilia's heads apart, Chifuyu-nee stood in front of me.

"Orimura, deploy your weapon. You should be able to do so at will, right?"

"Yeah."

"Answer 'yes'."

"Ye-Yes."

"Okay, let's begin."

Hearing her words, I turned to the side. After confirming that no one was in front of me, I, once again, used my left hand to grab my right wrist.

—It can cut through objects, has the shape of a sword. It's a sharp, solid object, and also a strong weapon—

(Come out...!)

My left hand held onto my right hand tightly, and at the moment my focus was at its peak, my palm let out a glow, which shaped itself into an object.

Once the glow vanished, my hand was holding onto the 'Yukihira Nigata'.

(Great, now I can summon it all the time!)

It's also a hard thing to imagine this, but this is to be expected, right? Who'll start thinking of a sword when going about with their daily lives?

"Too slow! Practice until you can summon it within 0.5 seconds."

Ack, there she goes again...not only did she not praise me, she even looked down on me. No matter what she says, This is all I could improve within just one week!

"Cecilia, deploy your weapons."

"Yes!"

She raised her hand to where her shoulder was, and then stretched her arm to the side. Unlike me, she didn't glow, but gave off a sudden burst of light. With just that, she was already holding onto the 'Starlight MkIII'.

Compared to me, she was a whole lot faster, and her gun was loaded. Cecilia just had to look in order to remove the safety. Within one second, she deployed her weapon, even getting ready to shoot.

"As expected of a representative candidate—however, you've got to change your pose. Who're you aiming at when you point your gun to the side? Try and point it at the front."

"Bu-But, but I need to maintain this for my image—"

"CHANGE IT! YOU HEAR ME?"

"—...yes."

Cecilia looked like she wanted to argue back, but she immediately shut up after Chifuyu-nee glared at her. Seems like we just trained one good soldier!

"Cecilia, deploy your close-range weapon."

"Wha? Ah, yes, yes!"

Cecilia seemed to be grumbling about something (that's definitely it), so she got shocked when she was called, and answered slowly.

The gun in her hand became light particles—this seems to be called 'keeping'—and then, she 'deployed' a new close-ranged weapon.

However, the glow in her hand couldn't shape itself as it floated around in the air.

"Huh..."

"Isn't it ready yet?"

"It, it'll be ready soon—ahh, damn it! 'Interceptor'!"

She half-reluctantly shouted out her weapon's name. After her focus gathered, the glow shaped into the weapon.

However, the preface of the textbook did mention this before. It mentioned that this is a 'beginner's method'. For a representative candidate like Cecilia to deploy the weapon through this method, it's really humiliating.

"...How long did you take? Do you want the enemy to wait for you in a real battle?"

"In, in a real battle, I wouldn't allow the enemy to enter my range! So, so there would be no problem!"

"Oh? But against Orimura, you seemed to have easily let a beginner get close to you."

"Th-That, that's because..."

Cecilia mumbled; Not knowing what to do, she was obviously unable to speak clearly. Just as I was looking at this indifferently, she glared at me.

At that moment, a signal came through a private frequency.

"It's all your fault!"

Why?

"Be-Because you came rushing at me..."

My IS only had a close-ranged weapon, of course it became like that.

"You, you better take responsibility!"

What do you want me to take responsibility for?

—On a side note, I didn't respond to her signals, she was just sending them to me. Maybe I should say that I have no idea how this private frequency is to be imagined. What's with the 'imagine with the rear right side of the head to communicate'? And what rear right side of the head are you talking about?

"Time's up, that's it for today's lesson. Orimura, clear up the field."

You mean that you want me to fill up that large hole? Where's the soil?

I glanced at Houki, only to see her quickly turning her head away. Seems like she doesn't want to help out.

As for Cecilia—she was long gone.

...I got it! You people want me to settle this by myself, right? Forget it, This is a man's job, as it is one which requires strength. Those guys who need girls to do labor work are just trash.

(Never mind, I had it coming...)

Seems like I've still got a long way to go before I can thoroughly learn how to pilot an IS.

"Oh, so this is the place..."

At night, in front of the IS Academy Entrance, stood a girl with a Boston bag that didn't match her petite size at all.

Her hair that was flowing in the still warm April night was tied with two ponytails on both sides at the top of her head. Her hair that looked like it was going to touch her shoulder was a pretty brown color that matched the yellow hairband it was with.

"Lemme see, where's the reception counter?"

She pulled out a slip of paper from her shirt's pocket. That crumpled piece of paper really was proof of the girl's straightforward character and her lively nature.

"The 1st level General Service Counter in the Main Building...so I want to know, WHERE IS IT?"

No matter how much she grumbled, she won't get an answer from the paper. The girl stuffed the paper along with her frustration into her shirt pocket. Even though the crumpling sound could be heard, she didn't mind at all.

"I'll just have to find it, right? So be it!"

As she muttered this, her feet continued to move. ' Instead of thinking, why not take action?'— that is the sort of girl she is. To put it nicely, she followed the ' practical doctrine'; to put it bluntly, she 'doesn't thoroughly think things through'.

—Really...I was told that no one would come to pick me up, but isn't this too ruthless of them? Those government people, really...aren't they worried about dumping a 15-year-old girl in a foreign country?

At first glance, the girl looks like a Japanese, but taking a closer look, she doesn't really look like one. Those sharp and beautiful eyes of hers belong to a Chinese.

Even so, to this girl, Japan is not only her second homeland, it's also a place that she's very familiar with and has fond memories of. As History puts it aptly ' History is a human's story'.

(Is anyone around? A student or a teacher? Anyone who can lead me?)

As she continued to walk in this unfamiliar school, she was still looking around for people. However, it was already past 8pm, and the lights in the campus were already out. At this hour, the students were already in their dorms.

(Ah—that's enough! So troublesome! I might as well fly through the sky and look...)

Despite her 'this is a good idea' feeling, upon remembering the school rule book, which was as thick as 3 'city telephone directories', she immediately dismissed it.

"It would be bad if you activate your IS at school before being formally transfered! In the worst case, it would become a diplomatic issue. Please spare us that

agony!" Once she remembered the high-ranking officials pleas and useless expressions, the girl started to feel better.

(Haha, that's right, I'm an important person as well! Better have some self-discipline.)

To be honest, seeing adults many times her age kneeling down and begging her stirs a good feeling.

For her, who has always hated 'adults who flaunt on their seniority', today's society could be described as ` comfortable´.

"Men's muscle power is just a kid's act, a lady's IS is the real justice'. She was happy about this as well, because she had always been a girl who hated 'kids whom are full of themselves just because they're males'.

—However, that guy's different.

She remembered a certain boy. To her, he was the biggest reason for her return to Japan.

—I wonder if he's doing alright now?

Hm, maybe he's still rather energetic. She never saw him being gloomy. He's that kind of a person.

"Besides...that's..."

Suddenly, a sound was heard. She turned to its point of origin, and saw some girls coming back from an IS training facility. She could immediately identify it because all IS related facilities in every country look similar.

—Great, I'll just ask them!

The girl strolled towards the entrance of the arena to ask them.

"Anyway, I'm not thinking like that!"

The unexpected shout shocked the girl as she stopped.

It's a guy's voice—similar to one she's familiar with. No, most likely it is that person's voice.

This unexpected reunion caused the girl's heart to race.

—Will he recognize me? He should be able to, right? It has been only a year.

She told herself this while being distracted by the thought 'what if he doesn't recognize me?'.

—It's alright, it's alright! Besides, if he doesn't recognize me, it means that I've gotten prettier!"

Getting into an ultra-optimistic thinking mode, she once again moved forward.

"Ic—"

Ah, the volume's too much! Doesn't this mean that I'm mindful about this? So embarrassing!

"Ichika, when are you going to grasp that feeling? You've been stuck at it since last week!"

"That's because your explanation is too unique. What's that 'huh' feeling?"

"...It's a 'huh' feeling."

"Didn't I tell you I don't know what that is—Hey, wait for me, Houki!"

The boy chased after the girl as she walked very fast.

—Who's that girl? Why do they seem so familiar with each other? Why are they calling each other by their names?

The racing heartbeat vanished as if it had never taken place, and it is replaced with an icy feeling, as if an avalanche had struck, stirring her with frustration.

After that, she quickly found the General Service Counter . The main building was actually behind the arena, and since it was lit over there, she immediately found the place.

"Mm, then, the procedures are complete. Welcome to IS Academy, Huang Lingyin-san."

The receptionist's friendly words seemed distant to her , as none of it was engraved into her brain. The girl—Lingyin didn't look happy at all. She pouted and asked,

"Which class is Orimura Ichika in?"

"Oh, that famous kid? He's in class 1. Huang-san's in class 2, so you're in neighboring classes. Oh yeah, that kid's the representative of class 1. As expected of Orimura-sensei's younger brother!"

It's women's nature to gossip. Lingyin coldly stared at the receptionist, who noticed this as the girl continued to ask,

"Is the class representative of class 2 decided?"

"Yes!"

"What's her name?"

"What? Erm...why are you asking this?"

Perhaps because she noticed that Lingyin's attitude was a bit weird, the receptionist looked troubled as she asked.

"I would like to ask her if she could relinquish the position of class representative to me—"

Veins could be seen popping out of her smiling face.

"Orimura-kun, congratulations on becoming the class representative!"

"Congratulations~!"

PA! *PA!* *PA!* *PA!* The pops land on me from all directions, and the colored ribbons that land on me weigh a lot more on my heart than the actual weight itself.

On a side note, it's now free time during dinner, and this is a campus restaurant. Everyone in class 1 is gathered here, and each one is holding their own drink. The atmosphere's rather animated.

"..."

I don't want to celebrate! I don't want to celebrate at all ! What's with this party?

I glanced at the wall. There's an 'Orimura Ichika Class Representative Assignment Party' banner. Oh, so it's a assignment party...sigh.

"Ya—the class representative tournament will be a lot more exciting!"

"That's right, that's right!"

"We're really lucky to be in the same class as him."

"That's right, that's right!"

From those girls conversation, they should be from class 2, right? Or is it just me? Speaking of which, isn't it too strange? There's definitely more than 30 people here. Why is it that there are more people than there are in our class whenever we gather everyone in class?

"You're really popular, Ichika."

"...You really think so?"

"Humph."

Houki gave a cold response before drinking. Why is she in a bad mood again?

"Look over here, look over here. I'm from the News Paper Club. I'm here to do a scoop on the hotly discussed freshman — Orimura Ichika-kun's special interview!"

Everyone gave an excited 'oh'. What 'oh'?

"Ah, I'm Mayuzumi Kaoruko, nice to meet you. I'm the vice-president of the News Paper Club. Here! This is my card."

I received the card and looked at the name. Sure has a lot of strokes in the kanji, she herself must feel that it's bothersome to write her own name.

"Then, then, Orimura-kun! Please state your thoughts on becoming the class representative. Here!"

She held the recorder in front of me, her eyes shining like the ones of a naive kid.

"Erm..."

What should I say? I have no intention of going along, but I can't betray everyone's expectations. Sigh, I'm just a weak Japanese anyway.

"Huh, anyway, I'll do my best."

"Huh—give us something awesome~~ like, like 'don't get too close to me, you'll get hurt' or something like that! "

What the heck! That's a popular line from the last generation, right?

"I don't really talk a lot."

"Wow, an outdated proclamation!"

What? Are you mocking the Japanese actor that we're so proud of?[1C 1]

"How about you make up a few sentences?"

This isn't good at all! Do news broadcasts air all arbitrary and biased news? That's scary!

"Oh yeah, how about having Cecilia say a few words?"

"I don't really like to make this sort of interview, but since you asked me, it can't be helped."

Though she's grumbling, she doesn't look like she's refusing...and she's already waiting over there! I don't know if I'm thinking too much, but her hair's a lot more glamorous than usual. Maybe she's ready to take a photo or something?

"Ahem. Then, first, we'll have the ex-class representative make a statement, so—"

"Ahh, if it's going to be long, forget about it. Just take a photo."

"You, hear me out to the very end!"

"No problem, I'll just make up some content. Oh, let's just assume that you like Orimura-kun."

"Wha, wha, what...?"

Cecilia immediately blushed. Seems like she's definitely angry. Hm, better find some cover from the fire.

"What nonsense are you spouting?"

"What, really?"

"That, that's right! What's stupid about it?"

What, that's weird? Why is Cecilia angry at me? Don't glare at me. That's scary.

"Ba-Basically, you—"

"Okay okay, anyway, both of you, please stand together! I'm going to take a photo now."

"What?"

Cecilia sounded rather surprised. However, it seemed like she was rather delighted as well.

"Because you have your own personal IS! Let me take a photo. Ah, it would be good to hold hands too!"

"Is, is that so...that's right."

For some reason, Cecilia, who's starting to fidget, continues to peek at me. I'm getting the 'now's the chance , but I can't let people feel that I'm very casual' vibe from her.

"Excuse me, but you'll give me a copy of the photo, right?"

"Of course."

"Then let me go change clothes first—"

"No way, that'll take too much time. Okay, hurry up and stand together."

Mayuzumi–senpai pulled Cecilia's hand and mine before making us hold hands together directly. What a hard-styled senpai.

"..."

"What is it?"

"Not-Nothing, nothing at all."

As she was staring at me, I thought that she felt that something was wrong. Seems like I'm mistaken. Really, I really can't understand her.

"..."

"...What now, Houki?"

"Nothing."

This side's staring at me as well...I'll omit that, please read on.

"Then I'm going to take it. What's 35 times 51 divided by 24~~?"

"Huh? Let me think...2?"

"Wrong—it's 74.375!"

What the heck.

Pacha! She pressed down on the shutter of the digital camera...hold on, hey!

"Why is everyone squeezing together here!?"

Everyone in class moved at an utterly terrifying speed as they immediately gathered around Cecilia and me the moment the photo was taken. Ah, even Houki's moving in! What is this group of idiots trying to do?

"You, you people!"

"Don't mind, don't mind."

"Cecilia can't just have a headstart, right—"

"Wouldn't it be great to have a class memory?"

"That's right—"

Everyone was unanimously saying persuasive-like things to Cecilia. Why is that?

"Erm, uu..."

My classmates started to stare cheekily at Cecilia, who was unable to say anything...why's that so?

Anyway, this 'Orimura Ichika Class Representative Assignment Party' lasted until past 10pm.

Damn it, I underestimated the girls' energy. Before I realized it, it was already late at night, and my strength had already vanished for no apparent reason as I collapsed onto the bed.

"Today sure was fun, right? Good for you."

Houki said such irritating words with a mocking tone. What's she planning to do? Start a quarrel with me?

"Who says that I'm happy? Would being tired make me happy? If you were in my position, would you be happy?"

"Uu...ah, that's right, maybe I would be happy!"

She definitely doesn't feel that way, but this person here would never take her words back once she says it, and would always end up suffering. She's that sort of person. Seems like I'll have to end this conversation quickly, or else even I'll feel weird if she's going to continue on with something weirder.

"Whatever. I'm going to sleep now."

"Wha-What? It's just 10.30pm!"

"I'm already tired! It's best to sleep now."

After I said that, I snuggled into my bed; and then, a pillow suddenly came flying over at me.

"Hey—what's with you?"

"That, that is something I should be asking, right? I'm going to change into my sleepwear, so face the other direction!"

Though we've been living together for more than a week, why is it that she always wants to change into her sleepwear when I'm around? Couldn't she have done it when I'm brushing my teeth? Really, I wonder that myself.

"Hey, Houki. I did tell you before that you should change clothes when I'm not around—"

I got glared at.

"I get it, I get it. I'm turning over now."

That's why I said that girls are hard to understand. Anyway, I turned to face the other side.

"..."

"..."

That's right, I hate this silence. It feels strangely long, and the sound of clothes rubbing together really bothers me. I'm a healthy 15-year-old, it's hard to get used to this uncomfortable feeling.

I heard the sound of clothes being put on, and my mind recalled the time when I saw her finish bathing, which made me unable to calm down.

After that, the sound of her changing clothes affected me, and I couldn't sleep at all.

"I-It's fine now."

After gaining permission, I again turned my body around. Though I do feel that there's no need to deliberately switch around like that, but after I said that just now, Houki got angry for some reason, so I decided not to mention it again.

"Oh? Is that a new sash?"

Houki changed into a bedtime yukata. She's really one traditional-styled person. However, I do feel that it looks good too.

Anyway, since the sash is different from what it was yesterday, I pointed that out without thinking much further.

"You, you sure are perceptive."

That's strange? Is it my imagination? For some reason, I feel that the sharp attitude of hers is gone now, and, did her mood improve just now? I really can't understand her.

"No, it's not that. The color and pattern are different, so of course I would notice it. I look at Houki every day after all."

"Is, is that so? You were looking at...me? I get it, I get it ."

Why is she nodding about it so happily?

"Okay! Let's sleep!"

Is this the enthusiasm that a person who's about to sleep should have? She's really strange.

Anyway, Houki snuggled into her bed and turned off the lights. The room was filled with silence.

(Uuu...I missed the opportunity to sleep.)

Sleepiness is something that occurs in moments. Once I miss it, it'll be hard to sleep before it occurs again. Maybe that's just for me though.

"...Ichika."

"Hm?"

"Just, just now, about what happened...I'm sorry."

What is she talking about? Since I couldn't recall, I simply replied,

"It's fine, don't worry about it."

"Is, is that so? Then that's fine...then, goodnight."

"Ah, goodnight."

Being sleepy right from the beginning, I never let go of this sleepiness now as I gradually slipped into dreamland.

In that night's dream, for some reason, I started to recall what happened in the past.

"Good morning, Orimura-kun. Have you heard about the rumor of the transfer student?"

In the morning, just as I was about to sit down, my classmates started talking to me. It's been several weeks since I entered school, and I can talk with the girls normally, so this should be considered a huge improvement, right? Besides, it would be lonely if I were left alone in class.

"A transfer student? At this time of the year?"

It's just April. Why isn't it an enrollment but a transfer? Besides, I heard that the conditions required to enter this

IS Academy are rather strict. An exam's definitely required, and without a country's recommendation, it's impossible to enroll here. Which means—

"That's right. I heard that it's a transfer student from China!"

"Woah, is that so?"

Since we're talking about a transfer student.

"Oh my, so is she wary of my existence and decided to transfer in?"

Class 1-1's representative from England, Cecilia Alcott; like usual, the pose of putting her hand on her hip really fits her this morning. Don't tell me that all English folks would do this pose?

"She can't possibly transfer into this class, right? There's nothing to get worked up over."

That's strange. Houki was definitely walking to her seat (at the front row near the window), and somehow she appeared beside me who knows when. Since Houki's a girl, she should be rather sensitive about this sort of rumors, right?

"What sort of girl is she?"

Since she's a representative, she should be rather strong, right? And she's also like Cecilia. What, is she an arrogant person? Really, I'm sick of it. Oh well, at least she's going into another class, so doesn't concern me.

"Uu...are you concerned about that?"

"Hm? Yeah, a little."

"Humph..."

After I answered honestly, for some reason, Houki's mood worsened as she shows an unhappy look. Nowadays, it seems like her mood will swing from good to bad; such a troublesome person. Is her mind unstable? Or maybe that's the rebellious mood that commonly appears among youths, right?

"You don't have the time to think about other girls? The class representative tournament is coming up next month."

"That's right! Just like that, Ichika-san. In order to get ready for the class representative tournament, we'll be

having more practical lessons. As for the opponent, allow me, Cecilia Alcott to take that place. Besides, the only ones with a personal machine in this class are me and Ichika-san."

She forcefully emphasized the 'only'...but that's right. If it were the other classmates, requesting a training suit, getting authorization and optimizing it would take a whole day, so if I want a quick mock battle, asking Cecilia would be the fastest way.

On a side note, the class representative tournament is just what the name implies, it's a battle between the class representatives, and a chance to give everyone a realistic goal before they really start learning how to pilot an IS.

Besides, this also seems to allow the classes to act as units and allow each other to work together.

In order to motivate everyone, the class that gets the first prize will earn half a year's worth of free dessert coupons. I see, no wonder the girls are so excited.

"Oh well, I'll do what I can."

"Doing what you can isn't enough! Ichika-san, you have to win!"

"That's right! As a guy, how can you not have some self-confidence!?"

"If Orimura-kun wins, the entire class will be happy!"

Cecilia, Houki and all my classmates, they are all saying nice things. But even if you say that, though not too serious, the obstacles I've faced in my basic IS training won't allow me to confidently answer everyone's expectations.

(I did have a nostalgic feeling when I first activated it...)

The feeling I first experienced was like a rebirth, and now it's completely gone. Even so, I'm steadily getting used to piloting an IS because [Byakushiki] is getting optimized to my characteristics...or something like that, right?

One, two, very soon, everyone started to gather, and I was surrounded by girls. Since this is something that happens normally, I've gotten used to it.

However, the one thing I really can't get is that girls really like to gossip.

"Do your best, Orimura-kun!"

"This is for the free coupons!"

"At this point, only the representatives from class 1 and class 4 have a personal IS, so it should be easy to win this!"

As I didn't want to ruin my classmates' exciting mood, I merely replied with a 'yeah'.

"—Your information is outdated."

Hm? A voice came from the entrance of the door. Why do I find that voice familiar...

"The class representative of class 2 also has a personal IS, you know! You can't win that easily."

The person who folded her arms in front of her chest as she puts a leg on her other kneecap and leans on the wall is—

"Rin...? You're Rin, right?"

"That's right. I'm the representative candidate from China, Huang Lingyin. Today, I came here to declare war ."

She gave a little smile as her trademark twin ponytails swayed about left and right.

"What are you acting cool for? It seriously doesn't suit you."

"Wha...? Why are you saying something like that?"

Ohh, at least she finally reverted back to her normal way of talking. What was that tone about just now? Really, I can't understand that.

"Hey!"

"What was that for—"

PA! Asking that, Rin got hit viciously by the attendance book—the instructor from hell has arrived.

"It's time for SHR. Head back to class."

"Chi-Chifuyu-san..."

"Call me Orimura-sensei! Hurry up and go back, don't block the door here. You're a bother"

"So-Sorry..."

Rin trembled as she retreated from the door; that attitude clearly shows that she's afraid of Chifuyu-nee. She's always been afraid of Chifuyu-nee, but I just don't know why.

"I'll come again later. Don't run away, Ichika."

Why must I run away?

"Hurry up and get back."

"Ye-Yes!"

She dashed towards class 2. Hm, still the same Rin I know. However, why must she purposely come all the way here just to act cool? Is she trying to change her image after entering High school? That really doesn't suit her at all.

"So, she's an IS pilot? This is the first time I heard of that..."

I subconsciously uttered out what I was thinking...this is bad.

"...Ichika, who was that? Someone you know? You two seem rather familiar with each other."

"I-Ichika-san? What sort of relationship do you have with that girl—"

Everyone else started to gather their fire as they aim and fire questions at me. Sigh, I was so stupid...

PA! *PA!* *PA!* *PA!*

"HURRY UP AND GET TO YOUR SEATS, YOU BUNCH OF IDIOTS!"

Chifuyu-nee's attendance book puffs out fire...is it my fault?—yes it is.

(Hm—but why am I reuniting with all the people I know? What they call life is really inexplicable.)

And then, a whole day of IS training begins.

(Who was that girl just now...seems like she's very familiar with Ichika...)

Getting so concerned about the girl that appeared this morning, Houki has been unable to concentrate during class.

(Besides, Ichika seems like he—)

It seems like they're childhood friends.

—She got infuriated.

(I should be his ONLY childhood friend, right...!?)

She continued to try and suppress her anger as she glanced at Ichika. But maybe he was really affected badly by the setback he had yesterday, as he was studying seriously.

(I can't even concentrate on the lesson, and you even...!)

She started to feel a lot angrier, and started to develop a little 'notice me some more!' feeling.

"..."

However, calming down and thinking about it, it's really nothing.

Besides, since she's living in the same room as Ichika, like yesterday, they can have time on their own.

(Really, such a worthless guy, I'll be the one to teach him more IS stuff!)

She folded her arms in front of her and smiled heartily. Her advantage won't change, this remains the same even with the presence of the girl that just appeared. Same goes for Cecilia, and the other classmates.

(Looks like we need more special training from today onwards.)

Houki nodded in happiness, her face unable to suppress the happy-look.

"Shinonono, what's the answer?"

"Yes! What?"

Having her name called out, Houki accidentally raised her voice. They're having lessons now, and Orimura-sensei, not Yamada-sensei, is giving the lesson now.

"What is the answer?"

"...I, I wasn't paying attention to the lesson..."

PAM! The sound of a painful impact echoed throughout. The attendance book remains as hard as ever !

"..."

At the back of the classroom, Cecilia was drawing in her notebook with the mechanical pencil. However, she was just drawing some random lines, unable to create any phrases.

(Who was that? That person just now!)

She was really bothered by that girl who was obviously close to Ichika. Right now, she already has the strongest opponent in Houki, and she couldn't let the number of competitors rise.

Besides, in terms of relationship—with Ichika, the girl just now is obviously closer to him. Right now, she feels like she's like a marathon runner who has almost finished, only to have a runner overtake her from behind.

(That's too despicable! She should be fighting with me fairly!)

Though she doesn't really know if she intends to fight fairly in a relationship battle, this is what Cecilia thought.

She has enough confidence that if they were to fight over something under identical conditions, she wouldn't lose, but since this is the first time she's fighting over a guy with someone else, things aren't developing as she had hoped. This fact made Cecilia really anxious.

(And that girl's actually a representative candidate—)

In this IS Academy, there are little more than twenty representative candidates. However, this should mean that each grade should have four of them. And subtracting Ichika, the number of people who have a personal IS should be 2. This is an advantage Cecilia should have, but now...

(She said that she has a personal IS as well...)

This is bad, this is really bad. It's like she had let the medal in her hand be forfeited and rendered useless.

(This, this is cheating, right!?)

But then, it doesn't matter right now. She has to fight for the driver's seat, and it'll be useless if she can't deal the deathblow to Houki and Rin.

(An IS mock battle won't be enough, I have to find something much more definitive—)

"Alcott."

"...How about I ask him out on a date. No, if I want an effective..."

"..."

PAM! The blond hair on her head got flattened by the attendance book.

"It's all your fault!"

"It's all thanks to you!"

When lunch started, the first thing Houki and Cecilia started to do was to scold me.

"What did I do now...?"

Just this morning alone, they got warned by Yamada-sensei 5 times and slammed by Chifuyu-nee 3 times. Don't they want to study?

Blanking out in front of Chifuyu-nee is like spreading barbecue sauce on their bodies in front of a ferocious tiger, as if trying to emphasize 'come, come eat me'.

"Oh well, if you have anything to say, we'll talk through lunch. Let's go to the canteen first."

"Uuu...well, since you said it, let's do it."

"That, that's right, it's not like I can't go along with you ."

Okay okay okay, thanks girls.

Including the other girls from our class, our entire clique moved off to the canteen.

Like usual, I bought a Japanese set at the lunch voucher vending machine. It continues to reasonably provide different types of food, which I am truly grateful for.

On a side note, Houki got a beancurd skin udon, and Cecilia got a Western-styled lunch. Eating that again? You should try some other types as well. But for me, I don't really have the right to say that.

"I've waited for you for a long time, Ichika!"

DONG!, with a single sound, the one blocking me was the famous transfer student, Huang Lingyin. Adding on to that, I'll normally just call her 'Rin'.

But this person over here really hasn't changed a single bit. Her hairstyle's still the same twin pigtails (or more accurately, they should be called high-side ponytails)—hm? Oh, I can tell that it's the same person, just like Houki! Deep inside, I pat on these two childhood friends of mine who have such a common trait.

"Okay okay, just stand aside. I can't hand the voucher over if you continue to stand here, and you'll be blocking everyone as well."

"How, how long-winded! I know that!"

On a side note, she's holding onto a bowl of ramen.

"The noodle will lose its spring."

"I, I know that! Seriously, it's because you made me wait for you for so long! Why didn't you come over earlier?"

How should I know? I'm not an esper.

Oh well, it's not like she's not talkative for once. Anyway, I hand the voucher over to the madam.

"Speaking of which, it's really been a while. We haven't met for exactly a year, right? How are you doing right now?"

"O-Okay. What about you? At least get sick for once!"

"What kind of wish is that..."

The people of the opposite gender around me...I'll cut that short, please read the above. Why am I surrounded by so many people with such offensive power? Is it because I'm inconsiderate? I'm really sorry for that.

"Ah—ahem!"

"Ahem! Ichika-san, your lunch is ready, you know?"

Houki and Cecilia immediately coughed loudly to interrupt my conversation with Rin. Ohh! So today's lunch set is salt-grilled mackerel. The appearance of that slightly charred skin really increases my appetite.

"The table over there is empty. Let's go over there."

Including Rin, I prompt everyone to follow along. Since this is a group of almost 10 people, it'll take us some time to move there.

Good thing we managed to move over to the table quickly. We're lucky.

"Rin? Since when have you been in Japan? How's aunty? When did you become a representative candidate ?"

"You've asked too much already. I want to ask you, how could you use an IS? I was shocked when I saw you on the news."

Since it's a reunion after a year, I tossed out many questions that I wouldn't normally be asking. As a childhood friend, I would definitely be intrigued by how she has been during this time. It was the same when I met Houki again.

"Ichika, it's about time you give us an explanation."

"That's right, Ichika-san! Are you...going out with this person?"

Maybe because both of them felt somewhat strange to me, Houki and Cecilia sounded rather shrill when they asked me. The other classmates of course nodded their heads excitedly.

"N-no-no-not really, we aren't dating..."

"That's right, why must we go to that extent? We're only childhood friends."

"..."

"Why are you glaring at me?"

"Nothing!"

Rin just got angry. Such a strange person.

"Childhood friend...?"

Houki replied with a surprised tone.

"Oh ya—let me see. Houki's family moved out when she had just finished 4th grade, right? Rin transferred in

during 5th grade. After that, she went back to China when she finished her sophomore year in Middle school, so it's been about a year since I last saw her."

I see, so Houki and Rin never met before. They just happened to miss each other when they moved.

"Then, this is Houki. Oh, I told you about her before, right? She's a childhood friend I've known since grade school, she's the daughter of the dojo owner where I used to go to train kendo."

"Oh, I see."

Rin stared at Houki carefully, and Houki, not willing to lose, did the same.

"Nice to meet you, I hope we can get along."

"Yeah, me too."

While both of them greet each other, for some reason, I seem to see sparks flying between them. Am I hallucinating because of all the fatigue I've built up? If so, I need a rest. Some French boss mentioned before that

Japaneses weakness is that they don't know how to rest. I'm finished, I'm already like this in High School. I'll definitely die once I enter society.

"Ahem! It would be bothersome if you forget about my existence. Representative from China, Huang Lingyin-san?"

"...Who are you?"

"What? I'm Cecilia Alcott, the representative candidate from England! Don't tell me you don't know me?"

"Um, I'm not really interested in other countries."

"Wh-Wha-What...?"

Cecilia got so angry that she couldn't even say anything. Her face is flushed red like a cooked cuttlefish —she would get angry if I say that, right? Better not say it.

"Let, let me say this first, I won't lose to someone like you!"

"Really? If we were to fight it out, I would win! Sorry, but I'm strong."

Rin said that in a somewhat proud voice. She hasn't changed one bit, always having a weird amount of self-confidence, and not having any malice in her words. This is the real her, she really thinks that way.

—But even if she doesn't mean any ill, some people might get angry.

"..."

"You, you actually dared to say it..."

Houki wordlessly put down her chopsticks; Cecilia trembled as she clenched her fist.

In contrast, Rin was still casually eating her ramen right in the afternoon. Casually (nani kuwanu), eating lunch in the afternoon (kao de meshi wo kuu)...that rhymes.

"Ichika."

GYA! Did they find out what I was thinking? I'm just thinking of something random, so there should be no reason for them to scold me...sort of.

"I heard that you're class 1's representative."

"Oh? Yeah, well, things just turned out like that."

"Oh..."

Rin picked her bowl up and started to drink the soup in large gulps. This person doesn't use anything like a spoon, maybe because 'she doesn't like to lack the attitude of a guy'...you're a girl, right?

"That, if possible, may I guide you a little on your IS piloting?"

She turned her face away, only giving me a glance. It's rare to see Rin stutter like this.

"That would be gre—"

BAM! twice the sound of the table being slammed on . Houki and Cecilia stood up after slamming it hard.

"It's my job to teach Ichika! He requested me to do it!"

"You're in class 2, right? We won't receive help from the enemy!"

Wah, both of them look absolutely terrifying. Seems like they're really into the inter-class battles. I should look up to them a bit more.

"I'm talking to Ichika right now. Would people not involved please leave?"

"Who, who said that I'm not involved? Ichika begged me to train him!"

Well, I didn't go to the extent of desperately begging... huh, that's strange. Seems like this was said before; as usual, Houki emphasized on the 'desperately' part, and looks like she seems to insist on this.

"Since he's the representative from class 1, he has to be taught by someone from class 1. Seeing how it is, to suddenly appear like this, I'm guessing that you're plotting something—"

"I didn't just pop out of nowhere. I've known Ichika longer than you have!"

"If, if you're going to point that out, I've known Ichika since a lot earlier than you! Besides, Ichika has often come over to our house to eat, so we understand each other very well!"

"He ate at your house? However, the same goes for me ."

That's right, Rin's house is a Chinese cuisine shop. Though I would cook when Chifuyu-nee was at home, at that time, she was active as an IS pilot, so she didn't return home often.

Because of that, it was pointless for me to cook. If I'm going to eat by myself, though it's a little extreme, I just need instant noodles.

But speaking of that, instant noodles don't have any taste at all, and more importantly, they aren't good for your health. Because of that, I would consider going to a nearby shop. Rin's shop has cheap food which is delicious, and they are generous in their servings, so I would go there about 4, 5 times a week.

Because a lot of things happened during grade school, I would often go out with Rin. At the beginning...huh,

because of Rin's personality, our relationship began with a rocky start. But after a lot of things happened, we got to know each other to such an extent that we could call each other by our names.

(Speaking of which, it was the same with Houki. We started off rough as well; was it because of my misdeeds—ah, even Cecilia's the same!)

"I-Ichika, what's going on!? I've never heard of this!!"

"Neither have I! Ichika-san, I demand a proper explanation!"

"What's to explain...we're just childhood friends, and I often patronized the Chinese restaurant Rin's family owns."

After I told them without holding anything back, Rin, who was looking rather carefree, now seems rather unhappy.

In contrast, Houki and Cecilia heave a sigh of relief.

"Wha-What? So it's just a restaurant?"

"Oh my, I see. If it's just a restaurant, there's nothing strange about it."

The girls from my class also looked tense before relaxing. Wha-What? Has Chifuyu-nee arrived?

"Is your dad doing well? No, he should have recovered by now, right?"

"What...erm, he's doing well—seems that way."

Hm? Rin suddenly looks rather depressed, and I feel that something's wrong here.

"So, so then, you're free after school, right? Since we haven't seen each other for such a long time, let's find a place to talk! Maybe the restaurant in front of the train station."

"Ah—it closed down last year."

"Is, is that so...what the heck! How, how about a student restaurant? You should have a lot of things to talk to me about, right?"

Uu—there's nothing much to say, is there? I was totally busy during my 3rd year, but that isn't something worth talking about.

"—Sorry, but Ichika's having special IS training with me, so he doesn't have time after school."

Hold on! Houki, why are you deciding things for me? Don't I have the right to decide what I want to do after school? There's nothing more unreasonable than this!

"That's right, special training is required for the inter-class tournament. I have my personal IS, you know? That's right, while Ichika-san's training, I have to be around no matter what."

The disadvantage (?) just now seemed to have disappeared, and the two people seemed to have seized a chance to attack as they suddenly mentioned the special training. They even took away my time after school! Are you girls devils? No, wait, they're helping me out a lot here.

However, people sometimes would love to see some affections. Even so, you gals could have asked me first, right? You have to learn some social skills if you want to survive.

"Well then, after you're done with training, I'll come looking for you. Remember to leave some time for me, okay? Bye bye Ichika!"

Rin drank up the last gulp of soup, packed her things and walked away without waiting for my reply. As expected, she couldn't possibly be polite enough to say good bye to everyone before leaving, as she leaves the canteen.

(So I have to wait for her before I can refuse...?)

"Ichika, I have priority in your training!"

"Ichika-san, we'll be spending meaningful time in your training, don't forget this fact."

And I can't refuse them here as well. Really, I'm suffering. Sigh...

"Wha?"

After school, at the 3rd arena, I was expecting to see Cecilia training me on IS piloting, so I couldn't help but let out a sound when I saw that unexpected face.

"Wha-What's with that look...is it really that strange?"

"No, well, instead of saying that it's strange—"

"Shinonono-san? What are you doing here?"

That's right, Houki appeared in front of Cecilia and me , wearing the 'Uchigane' IS, deploying it.

Among IS that are locally produced, the Uchigane is a highly-rated 2nd generation frame. As it is a defensive model that focuses on stability, it's easy for beginners to use it, thus many countries, even this IS Academy, use it as a training model, so they're very common...all this comes from the textbook.

"What's with the 'why'? Ichika requested me to do so."

Did I—oh, I did, right?

"And besides, you still lack practice in close ranged combat, right? Which is why I'm stepping up here."

Just like she said, the Uchigane's design looks like an armored samurai. Basically, its only weapon is a 'close ranged sword'. Well, based on this alone, it really fits Houki, giving a 'end-age samurai' feeling.

A glare!

—Damn it, I got glared at.

"Uu...I never imagined that you could get permission to use it so easily..."

For some reason, Cecilia was looking rather unhappy. Why is that?

"Well then, Ichika, let's begin. Draw your sword!"

"Oh, okay."

Oh, so full of enthusiasm! That dull black metal color on the sword she drew smoothly exhibits its sharpness. Maybe this is called being 'warned', right? The chilly nervousness spread to my soles.

"Then—here we go!"

—At this moment, a voice interrupts us.

"Hold on a minute! Ichika-san's opponent should be me, Cecilia Alcott!"

Before I could even finish, Cecilia is already standing in front of me as she faces off against Houki.

"Hey, don't interrupt me! Or else I'm going to cut you down as well!"

"I'm not so fragile as to lose to a training suit!"

Houki let out a kesagiri, only for Cecilia to block it with her knife 'Interceptor'. Cecilia used the collision of the blades to pull apart and distance herself, then quickly squeezing the trigger with one hand. The 'Starlight Mk III ' fired off supersonic bullets.

—Wa! The battle started! No, wait, what about my training?

"HAAA!!"

"YOU'RE TOO NAÏVE!"

...I'll just wait for them to finish. The chill that flows through my spine tells me that it would be a disaster for me if I interfered.

"Ichika!"

"Why are you standing there, just watching this so casually?"

"Huh? What...you'll get angry no matter which side I help, right?"

"Of course!"

"That's right!"

See! What did I tell you? Speaking of that, Houki and Cecilia seem to only work well together in such a situation. Why is that so?

On a side note, it seems like it's also bad to remain silent. For the next several minutes, I was forced into a 2 vs 1 battle. Now, this is true hell...are you girls trying to kill me...?

"Then, that's it for today."

"Oh, okay..."

Unlike me, who was already out of breath, Cecilia looked just fine. Is this the difference in experience expected from a representative candidate?

"Humph! You're like that because you lack training."

Houki looks somewhat tired, but at least she's not as tired as me. ...That being said, the reason is that both of you were whacking at me! Isn't that too devilish!?

...But how can I put it? The sweaty Houki gives some sort of elegance, slightly raising my pulse--just 'slightly'. Please, lets leave it at 'slightly'.

"What are you doing? Hurry up and get back to the control zones!"

"Oh? Oh...huh, Houki? Why are coming this way?"

"I'm going back to the control zone."

"No, no, Cecilia's over there--"

"They, they're both control zones anyway!"

That's right. But if so, can't you just join Cecilia?

--Even though I wanted to say that, I could foresee a meaningless argument, so I just returned to the control zone.

"Hu..."

I undeploy my IS, and as it vanishes, so does its support, and the fatigue hits me.

After removing her IS, Houki retied her sweat-drenched hair, and said,

"You're tired because you made too many unnecessary movements. You've got to find a way to control it more naturally!"

She said this as we were returning. The kindness of this childhood friend of mine almost makes me cry. Houki, it wouldn't hurt if you gave me a handkerchief!

With Cecilia in the opposite control zone, before I noticed it, Houki and I were together alone.

Doesn't matter anyway, 'cause I'm thinking of getting a shower as soon as possible.

On a side note, the closest facility with showers is the social club tower, but it's in the complete opposite direction to the dorms, so it would be pointless for me to go there.

Even more, as there are no men bathrooms, I would have to use it together with the girls. Even though it doesn't bother me to be seen with just my underwear, it

would be a different story for the girls. Besides, there would be too many problems, and honestly, that's not tempting.

Or I should say that, instead of problems, I would get killed by Chifuyu-nee or Houki before I could even explain. Recently on the 'kill me' list, there's also a ' Cecilia' signature when she deploys her IS. That new sign beside her is ever so bright.

"Houki, I've got something to ask you..."

"What is it?"

"Please let me use the shower first. By the way, didn't you join the kendo club? If you're training with me everyday, you'll get pestered by the other girls in the club."

"You, you don't have to worry about that...the big problem occurs when I'm being chased..."

"Huh? What's wrong?"

"No, nothing!"

I don't know what's going on, but it seems like everything's okay. Looks like I don't have to worry.

"So, about the shower--"

"Ichika!"

The sliding door was opened.

Rin appears!

"Good work! Here's a towel! Also, a sports drink should be okay, right?"

Ohh, what's going on? Does this childhood friend of mine have a gentle side to her? I'm really grateful;.

"Thanks! Ah--I'm alive..."

It's already annoying having my face drenched in sweat. And right after wiping it off with the towel, there's a drink to effectively replenish the lost water. Even though I may find that it has too much glucose, that would benefit the body after a workout. Also, glucose is an important source of energy.

Let me go further on this; bringing a drink that's not cold was the right choice. Drinking a cold liquid after exercise is harmful for the body, especially when it's hot. It is best to drink lukewarm drinks. A cold drink might make people feel good, but being so negligent harms them, so, I don't think it's worthy.

"You haven't changed Ichika. Still so young, yet so concerned with your health."

"I told you, it's best to start early. This will form a habit , sparing your family from many worries!"

"You're just like an old man."

"Shu-Shut up..."

For some reason, Rin's staring happily at me as if she can see through me, making me nervous. That 'I understand you well' expression makes me feel ridiculously irritated for some reason. (Speaking of which, has she always looked so cute...?)

Last time I saw her was in Winter, during our second year in middle school, and it's been only a year since then

. But I'm somehow getting a 'girl's scent' within her brash attitude. Back then, I treated her just as a friend, but right now, the 'male' in me is reacting to this change in her.

"Ichika, you must have felt lonely without me, right?"

"Well, I would feel lonely if I lost a playmate, right?"

"I don't mean that!"

Rin was smiling. She had a delighted smile on her face, as she continued. Uu--it is exactly the same expression she used to have, whenever she was holding some weird movie ticket!

--AH! I see! Is she going to sell something to me? So scary, I almost fell into her trap.

"Rin."

"Hm? What is it?"

"I won't buy anything."

Rin stumbled. That's strange? Did I guess wrong?

"I'm saying...you're my long-lost childhood friend, you should have something to say to me, right?"

Something I should say...huh, I haven't thought of anything.

"For example--"

"Ahem!!"

Deliberately coughing to interrupt Rin, Houki says in an 'I don't care what you people do' attitude,

"I'm going back first, Ichika. As for the shower, you can use it first."

"Oh, thanks."

"Then, see you later, Ichika."

For some reason, it seems like she emphasized on the ' see you later' part. Am I thinking too much? It seems like I'm thinking too much...no, it definitely happened.

"...Ichika, what did she mean by that?"

After Houki walked out of the control room, it looked like Rin got in a bad mood--she tried to force a smile in order to hide it--and as she asked me, the voice she made was lower by two keys.

"Hm? Nothing, just that Houki's the one who usually showers first, but since I'm all sweaty now, I asked her if we could switch the bathing order--"

"Sho-Show-Shower? 'Usually'? Ic-Ichika, what sort of relationship do you have with that girl?"

"What relationship...didn't I say it before? We're childhood friends."

"Si-Sin-Since when are the terms 'childhood friends' and 'bathing order' related?"

Oh yeah, I haven't told her yet.

"I'm living in the same room as Houki."

"...What?"

"It's not like 'that'. My entrance was rather unexpected, and it seems like they couldn't get a room ready for me at the time. So I'm now living in a standard two people-room--"

"Do-Does that mean that you're living in the same room as that girl?"

"Hm? Sort of? But really, it's a good thing that it's Houki. If I had to live in the same room with someone I don't know at all, I would be too nervous to sleep."

"..."

"Hm? What's with you?"

"...if it's a childhood friend, it is..."

"?"

As Rin lowered her head, I couldn't hear her clearly, so I pulled my ears closer. I can't see her expression due to the angle.

"I'M JUST SAYING, IF IT'S A CHILDHOOD FRIEND, ITS OKAY, RIGHT!?"

"WAH!"

She forcefully lifted her head high, and I stepped back in shock. Had I been closer to her, I would have been headbutted by her.

"I got it, I got it! I see, I see, I understand it clearly."

For some reason, Rin was expressing that she understood something, as she continued to nod. What now? What did she understand?

"Ichika!"

"Ye-yes!"

"Don't forget that you have two childhood friends."

"I won't forget even if you don't remind me..."

"Then, see you later!"

After saying that, Rin dashed out of the control zone.

Will today's fluency award be presented to the 'see you later' part? It's only April!? Speaking of which, did she accumulate quite the experience? Rin? You do know that

'not doing what you promised' has many implications on trust issues, right?

"Ugh..."

Whether they're girls' thoughts, or even childhood friends thoughts, I don't really understand them at all.

"As I just said, let me change rooms with you!"

"Wha-what kind of a joke is this? Why should I listen to you?"

We were outside my room right now, and it was past 8pm. Right after I finished dinner, and was pouring some tea, Rin suddenly barged into our room, and things ended up like this.

--No, these two are completely at loggerheads.

"No, but Shinonono-san must hate living with a guy, right? Since you have to consider other people's feelings,

you probably can't relax at all. I'm not bothered by it, so I'm saying that we should switch rooms."

"I-I never said that I hated living together with a guy... besides, this is both Ichika's and my problem, so I don't want anyone else interfering!"

"Relax, I'm his childhood friend anyway!"

"What kind of reason is that?"

So far, the situation hasn't shown any progress; or better put, they can't seem to reach a common agreement. Rin has always had a 'do as I please' personality, and Houki's a lot more stubborn than normal people. No matter what, I can't see them settling this peacefully. Even when it's the 21st century, humans are still humans; old habits die hard.

Speaking of which, am I seeing things? It seems Rin brought her luggage bag over.

"Rin."

"Yes?"

"Is that your luggage bag?"

"Yup. All I need is a Boston bag and I'm ready to go."

She's as quick as ever. Among girls, Houki already has very little luggage, but Rin has so little luggage that it's an exaggeration. I once joked that she seemed capable of moving out anytime, and she got quite pissed off, so I never mentioned it again.

On a side note, when Cecilia brought me to see her room, for a moment, I thought that I had entered a high-class hotel. The bed, dressing table, table, even the chairs; all the furniture and decoration were specially ordered, even the wallpaper and lights--I only dare to say it now, but that was somewhat scary.

That was the first time I had ever seen a bed with a canopy over it. And the girl who's living with Cecilia looked really pitiful; almost all the space got taken by Cecilia! Hey, England's representative candidate, you should live more modestly, you know?

"Anyway, I'll also be living here from today onwards."

"Wha-what kind of a joke is that? Get out! This is my room!"

"It's also 'Ichika's room' right? Then there's no problem !"

After that, Rin turned to me as if she wanted me to agree with her. Houki also looked like she wanted me to agree with--getting Rin out--as she looked at me; or more accurately, glared at me.

"Please, don't get me involved..."

It hurts, I need a light painkiller pill here!

"Anyway, I won't switch rooms! You're the one who should get out, so get back to your own room!"

"Oh yeah, do you remember our promise, Ichika?"

"Don-don't you dare ignore me! Okay, if that's the case , I'll use violence..."

Completely agitated, Houki grabbed the shinai beside her bed, ready to be used anytime.

"Ah, you idiot--"

I couldn't stop her in time. Houki lost all her cool as she swung the blade at the completely defenseless Rin.

BAM!

Such a loud sound. No, wait, now's not the time to sit by and watch the show!

"Are you alright, Rin?"

"Of course I am. Right now, I'm--a representative candidate after all."

Looking closely, the attack I thought that hit her head was blocked by the IS part deployed on her right arm.

"...!"

More shocked than anyone was Houki. Even if the IS deployment is fast, the one doing that is the pilot--a flesh and blood human. In other words, the deployment can't possibly surpass human reflex.

And that attack wasn't at a level where a normal human could react at such an important moment. In other words, this proves a simple yet clear fact, Rin is strong.

"Speaking of which, had it not been me, that would have been very dangerous, you know?"

"Ugh..."

Maybe pointing out that she lost control in her anger was more effective than anything else. Houki looked full of guilt as she turned to look away.

"Fine, nevermind!"

Rin didn't mind as she removed the IS part. The right arm that was covered by the cool armor flashed and reverted back to its original state.

"Wha, that..."

How awkward. Houki remains silent as she's affected by the abnormal out-of-character moment she showed, and Rin's looking excited as she waits for my reply.

--Hm? Now that she mentioned it, she did say something about some promise or something.

"Rin, as for that promise."

"Wha. Mm, you should...remember that, right?"

She suddenly lowered her head as she continued to peek up at me, looking rather embarrassed. Is it just me?

"Let me see, you mean that one? If Rin's cooking skills improve, everyday, she'll cook sweet-and-sour pork--"

"Yup, that's right. That's the one!"

"--For me to eat, right?"

I remember that we seemed to have made that promise when we were in elementary school. Really, so amazing! I must have a good memory if I can recall that much into the past! Seems like my brain cells are seriously working; I'll have to reward it.

"...What?"

"Isn't it about the promise that Rin will treat me to eat, once she learns to cook"

Anyway, it's free, so there's nothing better than that.

"But I'm really impressed with my own memory--"

PA!

"...Wha?"

I suddenly got slapped. As it happened so suddenly, I couldn't understand what's going on. I blinked my eyes, and my gaze met Houki's. She was giving me a vague look as well.

"Wha, that..."

I slowly, really slowly, turned my face back to where it was facing, and see Rin. However, the thing I see is a scene I don't want to see the most.

"..."

Her shoulders were trembling, and she was glaring at me with hatred. Her eyes were watery, and her lips looked like she was about to cry anytime soon, as they remained sealed up.

"Oh, hey, Rin..."

"YOU'RE THE WORST! YOU CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER THE PROMISE YOU MADE TO A GIRL! YOU'RE A SHAME AMONGST MEN! GET BITTEN BY A DOG AND DIE!!!"

Right after it, Rin moved really fast; she grabbed the luggage on the floor as if she was snatching something, and charged out of the room, almost as if she had kicked the door.

BAM!! After hearing the noise of the door being slammed, I finally pulled myself together.

"...It's over, I made her angry."

It was completely my fault...I guess? Even so, I'm infuriated that she said that I'm the worst amongst guys. I don't remember making such a promise with her, that I had to get scolded to such an extent.

--No wait, she was crying...that's right, she was definitely crying.

"Ichika."

"Ah? What is it, Houki?"

"Get kicked by a horse and die."

GACK, WHY IS HOUKI ANGRY NOW? And my face's starting to hurt now. I hope the swelling subsides before tommorrow...

If it doesn't, I'll definitely face my classmates interrogation squad. No matter how many times I have experienced it, I can't get used to it. Speaking of which, why are the girls' topics so distant? To be honest, I can't catch up at all.

"Sigh..."

Anyway, let's sleep for today. Though it's not even 9, I can't do anything even if I'm awake. Besides, Houki's angry as well, nothing good will come of me being awake.

The situation should improve tomorrow morning... probably not. As the saying goes, girls' feelings last 3 times longer than guys'.

Sigh, why are the people of the opposite gender around me...I'll omit this part, please read the above text.

--The next morning, there was a large poster pasted on the students corridor.

The topic is **Class Representative Tournament Schedule**.

And my preliminary opponent is--Rin from class 2.

Chapter 4: Showdown! The Class League Match

May.

It's been several weeks since what happened that time, and Rin's mood hasn't improved, it has worsened.

Not only did she avoid me, she would deliberately turn her head away whenever we occasionally met in the canteen. Her firepower is all deployed in the 'I am really angry' department. Unfortunately, this anti-air firepower wasn't used on the Yamato-class battleships during World War 2...well, I don't know, but that's a pity.

"Ichika, the inter-class battle will be next week. The arena will undergo a settings adjustment, so today will be the last day for a practical battle."

After school, while seeing the sky gradually turning orange, I started to head towards the 3rd arena for my special training.

Like usual, the members were me, Houki and Cecilia. Thanks to the tense situation in my class simmering, the number of times I got surrounded by questions and stares has drastically decreased.

Even so, the fact that the raging topic is about me being in this school hasn't changed one bit. The stands on that day should be packed!

Let's cut at this part first. The 2nd years who sold the seats in the stands as 'reserved seats' were punished by Chifuyu-nee a few days ago. It seems the mastermind was confined in her dorm for 3 days. What in the world did they do?

"At least the IS control has gotten somewhat decent, so this time--"

"Because I've been training him as well! It would be strange had he not reached this standard."

"Since when is mid-range useful! First, Ichika's IS doesn't have any ranged weapons."

Houki's words were more forceful now, maybe because she got interrupted.

Truth be told, she's right. My Byakushiki IS doesn't have any ranged weapons, only the Yukihira Nigata.

Usually, every IS should have its own signature weapons, but only this 'prototype armament' wouldn't be

enough, so there are also side arms. For example, Cecilia's initial IS weapons are the Blue Tears, while the gun and close-ranged sword are the side arms. Something like that.

And for this sort of side arms, the ISes have something like an 'equalizer'. Though the number of armaments a suit can equip differs due to the specs, an ordinary IS can have at least two...that should be the case.

The reason why I said 'that should be the case' is because my IS doesn't seem to be like that. The number of equalizers I have is zero. And since I can't change my initial weapon, the weapons I have only include a close-ranged sword.

"If we're talking about credit, what about Shinonono-san's kendo training? It's useless to train without the IS."

"Wha-what are you saying? Haven't you heard the saying 'the essence of kendo is the 'insight'? The 'insight' refers to everything that is in front of the eyes--"

"Ichika-san, we'll start learning from the 'no recoil spinning attack' we worked on yesterday!"

"Hey, you--listen to me, Ichika!"

"I told you, I'm listening!"

Speaking of which, why are you venting your anger on me?

After sensing that something's wrong, I touched the sensor of the A control zone door of the 3rd arena. Through fingerprint and pulse identification, I got clearance, and the door opened with a 'whoosh'. No matter how many times I hear it, the release of compressed air still feels loud to me.

"I've been waiting for a long time, Ichika."

To think that the one waiting for me here is actually Rin. She folded her arms, looking rather cocky and fearless as she smiles. She definitely looked angry yesterday, so how much has her mood changed...ah, I can feel Houki and Cecilia frowning behind me. Don't look at me, it's not my fault!

"Why are you here—"

"Unauthorized personnel are not allowed to enter this place!"

Houki got interrupted again. Give it up, it's that kind of a day.

With an 'ah?', Rin gave a taunting smile as she said with self-righteousness.

"I'm authorized, I'm related to Ichika! So there's no problem."

Well, sort of, but isn't that a bit weird, Houki—

"Oh? Then I should ask what sort of relationship do you have..."

"I guess the saying 'the wicked strikes first' refers to people like you!"

Woah, even Cecilia's mad. But Houki's twitching lips are even more terrifying. Even if I'm not the one at fault, this silent rage puts a lot of pressure on me. Those with weak hearts, please take note, there's a humanoid weapon nearby.

"...Are you thinking of something rude, Ichika?"

"No, nothing. I'm just giving a chopper knife alert."

"You, you bastard—!!"

Rin interrupts me and Houki.

"It's my turn to take the stage, I'm the main character now, all supporting characters can just move aside!"

"Su-Supporting character—?"

"Okay okay. We won't be able to move on like this, so I'll explain later...Ichika, have you properly reflected?"

"Huh? About what?"

"About what, you say! You should feel regret about making me mad, or thinking how to 'make up with me', right?"

"Even if you say that...you're the one who has been hiding from me, right?"

"You...don't tell me you would really ignore a girl when the girl says 'don't bother me'?"

"Yup."

Isn't that obvious? If the girl doesn't want others to bother her, isn't it better to ignore her?

"Is there anything wrong?"

"Is there an...AHH, DAMN IT!!"

Rin shouted agitatedly as she scratched her head irritatedly. If you mess up your hair, it's not my fault!

"HURRY UP AND APOLOGIZE!"

Sorry, but I can't just agree to this one-sided request. It's not that I'm hesitating over that, but I just can't admit guilt in a case where I can't accept it.

"Why should I? I did remember the promise, right?"

"I don't believe it! Are you still talking about that? You were wrong about the meaning, the important thing is the meaning'!"

"Meaning (Imiga)?" That Okinawa dish made from pork? That's pig ears (Mimiga).

"You're thinking something rude again, right?"

Wah, found out again. As expected of the childhood friend that came after Houki, she has gotten used to observing me already!

"How infuriating. So you won't apologize no matter what?"

"That's why I said, I'll apologize when you give me a proper explanation!"

"It-It's because I didn't want to explain it clearly that I came all the way here!"

So what is it? I don't understand what she means at all.

But since I expressed it, I can't just back away like that. A man can't take back his own words like that so easily; a declaration without action is just sophistry or a lie. And sincerity is the result of continuing to take action. This is what a man has to prove.

"So be it! In the class rep battle next week, the loser will have to listen to what the winner commands, is that alright?"

"Okay, if I win, you'll have to explain it clearly."

Fight fire with fire, an eye for an eye, this is a deal that doesn't allow any backing out. As a guy, how can I step back after I've agreed? I won't be that shameless.

"Ex-Explain it..."

For some reason, Rin started to blush as she pointed at me. Why? Is it really embarrassing to say why you're angry?"

"What's the matter? You can back off if you want."

Good thing I said that cordially, but it seems to have the reverse effect on Rin.

"Who would back off? You better practice how you'll apologize to me?"

"Why? You idiot!"

"Who are you calling an idiot? You obstinate blockhead! Idiot! You're the idiot here!"

How infuriating.

"Shut up, you ironing board!"

—Ah, damn it!

Clang—!

The sudden explosion and impact caused the entire room to shake. Looking closely, Rin's entire right arm morphed into the IS part.

It was like punching the wall fully without touching the wall at all—it's that kind of an attack.

"You, said...you actually said something you shouldn't have said!"

Purple sparks flew through the IS defensive jacket.

—This is bad, she's really angry now.

"I-I'm sorry about that. That was my fault, that was all my fault."

"'That was'? It should be 'that was also'! It's all your fault no matter what!"

A really ridiculous logic, but unfortunately, I don't have any space to retort back.

"I actually wanted to go easy, but it seems like you really want to die...okay, I'll grant that wish—I'll crush you with all I've got until you can't stand."

Rin finally gave me a sharp glance that I'd never seen before, and left the control zone.

BAM...the sound of the door closing sounded really terrifying. The momentum Rin let out just now was that sharp.

I glanced at the door. There was a 30cm diameter hole. No matter how I look at it, she has enough power to break through a special metal wall.

"...A power-type! And she's a close-ranged type like Ichika-san!"

Cecilia seriously inspected the damage done. Compared to that, I just sank into the deepest regret I've had in the past few words.

(And I just had to say what I was thinking...)

And that was the phrase that would infuriate Rin the most. That was completely my fault.

(This is bad...)

No matter whether I win or lose, it seems like I'll have to apologize to Rin no matter what.

On the day of the battle, the match between me and Rin is held at the 2nd arena, and that will be the first match.

As it's the rumored battle between freshmen, there's not an empty seat in the stands. Even the sidewalks are completely filled with students. As for the people who can't enter the place, they can only view the match through the broadcast screens.

(...But now's not the time to be concerned about that, right?)

In front of me is Rin, who's silently waiting for the match to begin, and her IS 'Shenlong'. Like with the Blue Tears, the floating parts should be the unique characteristic of the 'Shenlong'. The cannons on both

shoulders look like they will attack on their own...it'll hurt if I get hit by them...

(But the name sure is something. Though the kanji is different...okay, I'll call it Kouryuu. It's kanji anyway. That'll be OK!)

"Then both of you, please get into position."

The broadcaster prompted us. Both me and Rin are in mid-air, 5m away from each other. Both Rin and I turn on our communicators and say to each other.

"Ichika, if you apologize now, I'll reduce the pain I'll inflict on you!"

"The pain will only be about a prick, right? I don't need my opponent to go easy on me. Show me what you've got!"

I'm not forcing it here. Like the battle against Cecilia, I'm always serious in battles; I won't deliberately go easy on others, and I don't like others going easy on me. This so-called decisive duel is like that, the battle is only meaningful if everyone goes all out.

"Let me say this first, the IS defenses aren't perfect. The suit can be damaged by an offensive power that can break through the defensive shields."

That's not a threat, but a fact. It's said that there seems to exist a 'final weapon' that can directly damage the IS pilot. However, it's against the rules, and more importantly, it's dangerous.

"It's possible to wreck the entire suit without killing the pilot."

This isn't any different from the situation now. And representative candidates should be able to do so, right? I should consider it a miracle that I could force Cecilia into a corner.

But a miracle won't occur twice in a row.

"Then both of you, begin."

HUA—with the sound of the buzzer, Rin and I start to take action.

CLANG!

The 'Yukihira Nigata' that was deployed instantly got blocked back by a physical shot. I use the 3 dimensional Cross grid and grab Rin from the front.

"Oh. You're quite good to be able to block my first shot like that. However—!"

The unique shaped 'scimitar' sword—even if I call it that, the shape's about the same—in Rin's hands is swaying about like cheerleaders' rods. As there are blades on both sides, they're more like weapons on a blade. Rin's attacking me from sideways, vertically and diagonally, and since it's spinning rapidly, it's hard to cut it in half.

(Not good. This will become a battle of attrition. Got to pull back first—)

"—That's too naive!"

PA!, Rin's shoulder guards open, and the moment the ball-like things fired, my body got 'blown' away by some invisible impact.

I immediately summoned back my consciousness that was gradually blacking out, but Rin didn't stop attacking.

"That was a jab."

She reveals a proud look on her face. After that, the real attack will come—!

DOMP!

"WAH!"

I got hit by the invisible fist onto the ground. The pain pierced through the defensive shields as they struck at me, and the suit got damaged quite a bit. This is bad!

"What was that...?"

Houki, who's watching the live broadcast from the arena, muttered.

Replying her is Cecilia, who's also watching the screen.

"'Impact cannons'. These compress the nearby air into a cannon barrel, and the resulting shockwave will fire it out like a cannon—"

They're 3rd generation weapons like Blue Tears, Cecilia said. However, Houki isn't listening, as on the screen, Ichika's in a tough spot.

Every time Ichika got hurt, Houki's heart would skip a beat.

(Ichika—)

It's a tougher battle than the one against Cecilia. More than getting victory, Houki just wants Ichika to be safe.

"You sure can dodge really well, even though the specialty of the 'Dragon's Roar' is that both the barrel and bullet are invisible to the naked eye."

That's right, because of that, I couldn't even see the barrel of the cannons, let alone the shots. And it seems like the oblique angles of these cannons can continue to attack without limit. They can attack from above, below and even behind. The trajectory is linear. So from these, it can be said that Rin's abilities are supreme, no matter whether they're 'unlimited movements' or 'all-around axis reversals', she managed to learn all the basics to a rather skilled extent.

To be able to mix and mash these basics together, she's really a tough opponent.

(Maybe I should use the hi-grade radar to find space and the atmospheric distortions, but that would be too slow. I can only detect it after I'm hit. Got to strike first...)

I gripped the 'Yukihira Nigata' tightly in my right hand and recalled the training last week,

"—'Barrier Void attack'?"

When I asked her, Chifuyu-nee nodded her head.

After my match against Cecilia, Houki and I had questions on why I lost.

Even after looking through the record of the IS battle, we couldn't get any conclusion. Thus, Chifuyu-nee, who was exasperated by our lack of progress, finally explained why that happened.

"That was 'Yukihira's ability. No matter how much shield value the opponent has, it can cut through the shield and deal direct damage to the main body. In that case, what would happen, Shinonono?"

"Ye-yes. The IS will activate the 'absolute defense', which will drastically deplete the shields."

"That's the case. I became Number 1 in the world because of this ability of the 'Yukihira'."

Though Chifuyu-nee said it, it's really an impressive thing to do. The 'Mondo Grosso' is held once every 3 years, and the person who won the first tournament was this Chifuyu-nee. As her younger brother, my feelings of having the N° 1 ranked sister in the world are both complicated and mystifying. This is how I truly feel.

"So this means that I could have won if I landed the last hit?"

"'If you had landed' it. Speaking of which, why do you think you lost?"

"Huh? I don't know why, but it's because my shield reserves dropped to 0, right?"

"There's no why, that's to be expected. How much energy do you think you need to activate 'Yukihira'? Are you an idiot?"

"...Ah—"

I see. This means—

"That means...that the shield's converted into attack power?"

Houki asked. Chifuyu-nee again nodded her head.

"In other words, it's a flawed suit."

—HEY!

" A FLAWED SUIT!? YOU JUST SAID THAT THE SUIT'S FLAWED, DIDN'T YOU!?"

BAM...looks like I have to be careful about my attitude when talking to a teacher.

"I didn't really put it in the right way. The IS is already an incomplete product, so it's not defective or anything else. It just means that compared to the other suits, the Byakushiki's somewhat unique in terms of offense. Most of the suits have their own equalizers, right?"

"That, that can be considered a flaw?"

"Listen to what I have to say! As there should be some equalizers left, they're used to wield the 'Yukihira', so its power is the strongest among all the IS."

Now that she mentions it, I remember.

(Chifuyu-nee only had the 'Yukihira'...)

And this Chifuyu-nee was the strongest. Just this alone is enough to tell how inhuman she is. I've always thought that she is amazing, and now, after I became an IS pilot, I finally realized how far Chifuyu-nee exceeded my expectations.

"In the first place, can an amateur like you survive mid-ranged combat? Suppressing the recoil, calculating the trajectory and pulling the distance, stopping suddenly, making an absolute turn...and also the characteristics of the projectile, the atmospheric condition , the effects of the armaments of the opponent; this is a strategic battle...and there are others! Can you do it?"

"...Sorry."

I could only admit my mistake by apologizing. Chifuyu-nee nods her head and says,

"It's good that you know. You're more suited for training on one aspect to the extreme, since—you're my younger brother."

After that, I focused all my training on close ranged combat and basic movements like emergency

acceleration and stopping. With the kendo training I had with Houki, I also grasped the characteristics of the ' blade' and the distance between two blades.

(What's left...is a heart that won't give up!)

Normally speaking, the difference in ability is too obvious. Besides, Rin's different from Cecilia in combat, she's calm and collected in battle. This sort of opponent is strong.

If I have to use 'something' to make up for the difference in ability, I guess that's the 'heart'. As long as my heart won't lose to anyone, the 'will' shall create a light in the darkness. I believe firmly in it, and now all that's left is to try it.

"Rin."

"What?"

"I will fight seriously."

I sternly stared at Rin. She showed an ambiguous look, probably being surprised by my attitude.

"Wh-Wha...isn't that obvious...an-anyway, I'll show you the difference of ability!"

Rin spins the two 'scimitar' swords like cheerleaders' rods before grabbing them. As for me, I get into position so that I can accelerate in order to close the distance before she fires.

I learned the skill 'ignition boost' this week; if I time it right, I can match up against her despite her representative candidate level. The IS pilot protective features prevents the pilot from being knocked out because of sudden G-forces that comes with acceleration.

"WOOOHHH!!"

As this sudden attack can only be used once, I have to use the 'barrier void' function of the 'Yukihira Nigata'. If I can't damage her cannons by more than half and cause them to be damaged bit by bit, I'll definitely be in disadvantage.

THOMP *THOMP* *THOMP* *THOMP!*

"?"

Just as Rin's blades are about to hit me, the entire arena shakes with a sudden boom. The cause--isn't Rin's cannons; the attack range and power is different.

Also, smoke can be seen rising from the center of the stage. Seems like the noise from just now was the shockwave caused by 'that thing' which pierced through the arena and its defensive barrier.

"Wh-What's going on...?"

Through the private line, Rin asked me, who's all confused because I don't understand what's going on.

"Ichika, the match's suspended! Hurry up and return to the control zone!"

What's Rin talking about all of a sudden? Just as I'm wondering this, the hi-tech sensors of the IS gave an emergency notice.

--The heard source in the middle of the stage is an unknown IS. Sealing the arena now.

"Wha--"

The arena and the barriers are made of the same material as the IS. As something which could penetrate it entered, this place is sealed.

In other words, we're in trouble.

"Hurry up, Ichika!"

"What do you want me to do?"

As I don't know how to communicate with an opponent, and I'm fighting while speaking for the first time through the chatter, I just asked Rin normally.

"I'll buy you some time, hurry up and run away!"

"Asking me to run away...how can I just leave a girl like that?"

"Idiot! You're weak! It can't be helped, right?"

Rin just said that without thinking. On a side note, since I don't know how to use the private line, Rin's using an ordinary line to talk to me.

"Of course I have no intention of fighting till the end. In this abnormal situation, the school teachers should be here to handle it--"

"WATCH OUT!"

At the last second, I lunged at Rin. The infrared laser was just shot at where we were.

"Ho-Hold on a minute, you idiot! Let go of me!"

"H-Hey, stop getting agitated--you idiot! Stop hitting me!"

"Shu-Shut up! You're too noisy!"

Though I have the shields protecting me, the cannon-like fists that are hitting at my face aren't something to feel happy for.

"Be-Besides, where are you holding me--"

"Incoming!"

Forget about Rin, right now, after the mist cleared, another shot is fired over.

After barely dodging the enemy's attack, the enemy IS floats over.

"When did this..."

The greyish IS looks abnormal; it's arms are abnormally long, all the way till below the waist, and there's no neck, shoulder or head that can be seen.

Most uniquely, it has a 'full-body armor'.

Normally, the IS will only deploy armor over only a part of the body, because there's no need to have a full armor. The defenses are all done by the energy shields, so the armor appearance is meaningless. Of course, there are defensive IS that can carry physical defensive shields, but even with that, an IS without even 1cm of skin revealed is something unheard of.

Besides, the large size of the IS means that it's not a normal one. Including the arms, the frame of that thing is over 2m long, and probably the jet propulsion nozzles all over its body are used to maintain its position. Its head reveals sensors that aren't arranged properly. There are also 4 holes on both sides of the forearms that allow it to fire those lasers.

"What are you?"

"..."

Of course--this is to be expected, but the mysterious intruder didn't answer my question.

"Orimura-kun! Huang-san! Leave the arena! The teachers will use their IS to suppress it."

The one who spoke through the broadcast was Yamada-sensei. Is it just me? Her voice seems a lot more serious than usual.

"--No, we'll deal with it before the teachers arrive."

The IS broke through the barrier. In other words, if nobody's going to be its opponent, it may end up attacking the audience.

"No problem, right? Rin?"

"Who, who do you think you're talking to? Be-Before that, let go of me! I can't move like this!"

"Ahh, sorry."

After I let go of her, Rin suddenly hugs herself as she moves away. Uu...does she really hate being touched by me? "I'm really sorry."

"Orimura-kun? No, you can't! If something happens to any stu--"

I could only hear up to there. As the enemy IS charges on, I focus in order to dodge it--success.

"Oh, seems like the enemy's raring to go!"

"Seems that way."

Rin and I stand besides each other, each wielding our own weapons.

"Ichika, I'll cover you with the shock cannons, so go right in. You only have that weapon, right?"

"That's right. Let's do this."

CLANG!, with that, we clashed our weapons. That's the signal; Rin and I charged forward with an improvised combination.

"HELLO, HELLO? ORIMURA-KUN, CAN YOU HEAR ME? HUANG-SAN!!"

There's no need to shout into the IS private chat, its just that Maya got so anxious that she forgot about that.

On a side note, the people around her must be thinking that she's just a weird person.

"Since he said that he wants to fight, why don't we just let him do so?"

"W-WHAT, ORIMURA-SENSEI! HOW CAN YOU CASUALLY SAY SUCH A THING!?"

"Calm down, and have some coffee. You're anxious because you lack sugar."

"...Erm, sensei, that's salt..."

"..."

Suddenly stopping the spoon that's pouring salt into the coffee, Chifuyu puts the white pieces back into the container.

"Why is there salt here?"

"Who, who knows...? But there's the oversized label ' salt' on it..."

"..."

"Ah, so you're worried about your brother? No wonder you made such a mistake--"

"..."

An irritating silence, a really irritating silence. Feeling that something bad may happen, Maya tries to change the topic.

"Oh, yes--"

"Yamada-sensei, please drink this coffee."

"Huh? I-Is-isn't that the one you poured salt in..."

"Here."

Facing the coffee (with some salt) being forced onto her, Maya can only weep as she accepts.

"I-I'll take it then..."

"The coffee is hot, just gulp it down in one go."

THERE'S A DEVIL HERE!

"Sensei, please allow me permission to use my IS! I can deploy it right away!"

"I would really want to, but--look at this."

Chifuyu knocks on the flatscreen display and changes the intel screen. These values are the data on the 2nd arena.

"The barriers are set at level 4...? And the doors are all locked--is it that IS's doing?"

"That's the case. Because of that, we can't evacuate nor send support."

Though Chifuyu's saying this calmly, on a closer look, her hands are unable to unrestrain her anxiety as she knocks onto the screen.

"If, if that's the case, why don't we ask for support from the government under the excuse of an emergency situation!--"

"We've done that already. Right now, the elites who have trained for 3 years are forcefully entering the system. Once we get rid of the shields, we can let the squads attack."

Having said that, the increasing anxiety causes Chifuyu's eyebrows to twitch. Treating that action as a signal of danger, Cecilia restrains her emotions as she sits down on the bench.

"Sigh...so we can only wait..."

"What's the matter? We won't be sending you into the assault squad, so don't worry!"

"Wh-What are you saying?"

"Your IS armaments are suited for taking on many suits, it would be a hindrance when used to take on one enemy, while being along many other suits."

"Such thing! To say that I'm--"

"Have you done any combined training before? What was that mission? How do you use a wide range weapon ? What's the setup of the enemy? Did you think of what the enemy level is? The suit's operation time--"

"I-I got it! That's enough!"

"Humph, its good that you get it."

Giving an 'I surrender' pose, Cecilia shakes her hands to prevent Chifuyu from going on rattling about what seems to be an hour long lecture.

"Sigh...I'm really unhappy about my own ineptness.."

Due to fatigue, the sigh is even longer than the previous one. Then Cecilia notices something.

"That's strange? Where's Shinonono-san..."

In contrast to Cecilia, who's looking around, only Chifuyu's looking sharply in a different direction. However, nobody has the time nor mood to realize this.

"Ugh..."

Though I got close enough to land a 1-hit kill, my attack got dodged easily.

This is already the 4th time I missed.

"Ichika, you idiot! Aim properly!"

"I am!"

I've been attacking the enemy suit at angles and speed that it's normally impossible to dodge. However, the propellers output throughout the suit are extremely abnormal, so much that it actually took it less than 1

second to get away from my reach! And no matter how Rin tries to attract its attention, it will prioritize reacting to my sudden movements and dodging it.

(How troublesome...)

My shields reserves are less than 60, I have only 1 chance to use the Barrier Void attack.

"Run, Ichika!"

"O-Oh!"

The enemy will normally counterattack wildly after dodging. Those extremely long arms let out roars of wind as they spin around at us like a spinning top. It continues to fire lasers at us while spinning rapidly, making it impossible for us to react in time.

"Ahh, damn it! This guy's irritating!"

Rin impatiently fires her impact cannons--however, the enemy's arm swats that invisible impact. That's already the 7th time.

Anyway, with Rin supporting me, I've managed to evade the enemy's firing barrage. As far as I know, it's

under the circumstances, in which the lasers are fired while spinning, that their reach is only half the usual.

"...Rin, how much shield reserves do you still have?"

"About 180."

This is energy that can't be used as an attack...or the HP (health points) in those games. Though she lost most of her shield reserves, at least she's better off than me. Speaking of which, my 'Yukihira Nigata' really eats a lot of energy.

"It's a bit tough...with the current firepower, I guess there's a single-digit chance of us breaking through that guy's shields and stop it, right?"

"At least it's not 0."

"You're really unbelievable. Of course the larger the probablity, the better! You always keep yapping away about how health should come first, just like an old geezer, an yet, you're the type who'll buy the lottery or play those slot machines, right!?"

"Shut up..."

On a side note, I've never taken in the lottery. I just can't gamble. During Middle School, I ended up treating Gotanda to who knows how many drinks. Humans only have their own savings, and the so-called pensions are just urban legends.

"--Now what?"

"If you can run, run."

"Wha...stop treating me like an idiot! I'm still a representative cadet! It's not funny to run away with my tail behind my back!"

So they do consider pride issues in selecting a representative cadet! Cecilia herself would say such things as well.

"Is that so? I'll cover your back then."

"Wha? Ah, mm...thanks--"

The laser barely sweeps past Rin, who's blushing for some reason. Damn it, we're in a battle now. Though we weren't too careless, we still try to focus as much as possible.

"...You know, Rin, that guy's movements are like something."

"Something? Are you thinking about a spinning top?"

"That's the appearance--what is it called? It's a robot that a car manufacturer created, right?"

"Is there?"

So you don't know? Seems like it's called 'ASI...'[1D 1] something

"No, well... doesn't it resemble a machine?"

"The IS is a machine!"

"I don't mean that! I mean...is there really someone inside it?"

"Ah? It's impossible for an unmanned IS to mo--"

Speaking up till here, Rin suddenly became silent.

"--Speaking of which, the enemy doesn't seem to attack when we were talking, right? It seems like it's interested in listening..."

As if pondering, Rin recaps the battle up till now. Her rather strict expression is different from usual.

"No wait, there has to be somebody inside. An IS can't move without anyone in it. That *is* how it is."

I read about it in the textbooks before. An IS definitely can't move without anyone inside.

But is that really true? Even now with the latest technology, it's not impossible. No matter what, we just can't remain silent about that.

"If, and just *if* it's an unmanned suit, what do we do?"

"What? Can we win if it's unmanned?"

"Yup, if there's no one inside, we can continue to attack without holding back."

The power of the 'Yukihira Nigata', including the ' Reiraku Byakuya', should be dangerously high, therefore , I couldn't use my full power in training or in matches, but if it's unmanned, it's okay even if I don't consider the worst case scenario.

--And i have a plan.

"You can't hit it even if you go all out, right?"

"I'll make it count the next time."

"How conceited. Though it's impossible, let's just see if it's really an unmanned suit!"

Does she know that I have a plan? Rin smirks brazenly . That's an expression she would show a year ago, a 'if you're wrong, you're treating me crepes from the shop in front of the station!' look. This gal's really evil, stop threatening for money from someone who's working part time! Really.

"Ichika."

"Hm?"

"What will we do?"

Rin shows a 'I'll help out, but if we fail, you'll...let's leave out the rest' expression. We exchange looks with each other; the scenario is just like an ancient saying of ' heart to heart'.

"I'll give the signal, and you hit that guy with your shock cannons with all you got."

"Okay. But what if I miss?"

"That will be alright."

--I have my own ideas.

"Then get ready--"

While I get into attack position, the audio broadcast of the arena lets out a loud voice.

"ICHIKA!"

Cree--carrying a loud extended echo along with it was Houki's voice.

"Wh-What are you doing..."

Looking at the audio room, the umpire and commentors have collapsed onto the ground! They probably got hit when the door opened, right!? And it looks like they won't be able to recover in the short term. Uwahh...

"IF YOU'RE A MAN...IF YOU'RE A MAN, EVEN IF YOU CAN'T WIN, YOU HAVE TO DEFEAT THAT KIND OF OPPONENT!"

She shouted, and the *cree--* echoes rings from the speakers. I use my hi-zoom sensors to look at Houki through a 10x zoom, and can see her panting 'ha...ha...' as her shoulders tremble. She looks angry, yet anxious, a really unbelievable look.

"..."

--Damn it! The moment I noticed it, the enemy IS seems to have gotten interested in the voice that came from the audio room. Its sensors turn away from us as they look at Houki.

"RUN, HOUK--"

Ahh, damn it! Since it's too late to say it, then--looks like I can only do this!

I get ready to attack and turn on my ignition boost. Closer in, I can see the cannons of the enemy IS aiming at Houki.

"ATTACK, RIN!"

"I-I got it!"

Lowering her arms and pushing her shoulders out, Rin gets ready to fire the largest impact cannon shot as I deploy my 'energy field wings' behind me.

"Hold, hold on a minute! What are you doing, you idiot?"

"Doesn't matter, hurry up and fire!"

"Ah, really...I don't care what happens to you!"

Feeling the high energy reaction behind me, I activated 'ignition boost'.

The 'ignition boost' works like this--the energy that's released from the wings behind will concentrate and compress all the power before releasing it, using inertia to release a sudden burst of speed.

This means that I can use external forces, and the ' ignition boost' speed will be proportional to the amount of force added.

THOMP! I feel a huge blast behind me. That's the blast from the impact cannons. While hearing the creaking sounds formed through the frame, I continued--to accelerate forward.

"---WOOHHH!!"

The 'Yukihira Nigata' in my right hand lets out a giant glow, and I can see the center release an even larger energy blade than the 'Yukihira Nigata'.

--'Reiraku Byakura' can be used. Output exchange exceeding 90%.

This information isn't heard, but understood. The first time I touched the IS, I had this feeling of having all the senses in the world, a consciousness that seems to have 10 times the focus...and most importantly, I feel the energy rising up withing me.

(I...will protect Chifuyu-nee, Houki, Rin--and everyone else!)

The one strike hacks the enemy's right hand.

However, my entire left hand got countered. Seeing the heat source, it seems like the enemy wants to counterattack with the lasers under close range.

""ICHIKA!!!""

I heard Houki and Rin shout--don't worry. Didn't I say that I have a plan?

"...Is the target locked on?"

"Perfectly!"

The voice came over. Though I feel that she can be too talkative sometimes, at this moment, her voice has never been so reliable.

At that moment, the 4 Blue Tears spear through the enemy IS from the stands.

That's right. The attack just now broke through the barrier.

BAM! The attack causes a small explosion, and the enemy IS falls onto the ground. Unshielded, the enemy shouldn't be able to take even a single second of the Blue Tears combination attack.

Though humans can expect it, an unmanned suit can't surpass the attack functions out of what it knows. A great person seemed to once said that free-will is humans ' greatest advantage, and that is the case here. Humans are cunning creatures who can operate differently and use tactics that robotics wouldn't think of.

"That was close."

"If it's Cecilia, it's possible."

I replied in a confident tone. Since she's an opponent I fought before, I know best how strong she is.

But are my words too unexpected? Her response seems rather barmy.

"Is, is that so...that, that's to be expected! Besides, I'm Cecilia Alcott, England's representative candidate!"

Right now, the conversation is held through a private channel. I don't know how to talk to someone I'm fighting for the first time, as for the opponents I talked to before, I can use the communicator records to reply.

It feels like using the rear right side of the head to talk on the phone.

"Hoo, either way, this is ov--"

--Enemy IS detection confirmed! Warning! Locked on

"?"

The left hand, the only remaining part of that IS, is aiming at me from the floor at maximum power.

While the laser strikes, I charge into it without hesitation.

In this white surrounding, I can feel the blade cutting through the armor--

"Uu..."

Being woken up by all the pain in my body, I open my eyes.

Not knowing where I am, I look around. This seems to be the infirmary, and I'm lying on the bed.

In the small and cramped space that's separated by the curtain, it makes me feel tight yet comforting. I continue to look around as my consciousness registers both these conflicting feelings as I try to understand what's going on .

(Hm...what's going on...? What happened after I was attacked--)

"You're awake?"

The curtain got pulled aside. Taking action before she confirms what's going on...ahh, that's definitely Chifuyu-nee.

"Your body didn't get any fatal injuries, but there are bruises all over your body. I guess you'll feel like you're living in hell, so get used to it."

"Yes..."

I'm still dazed. While hearing Chiifuyu-nee's words, I continue to wonder why my body is covered with wounds. My eyes naturally turn to look outside the window. The sky is gradually turning a deep red; it should be school dismissal time.

"You got hit by the largest blast of the impact cannons and yet you turned off the IS's absolute defense? To think that you could survive."

Hearing Chifuyu-nee's description, I still can't remember anything. Huh? I thought the absolute defense isn't something that can be shut down?

"Anyway, good to see you are safe. I would be unable to go on with my everyday life with ease if someone of my family dies."

Right now, Chifuyu-nee's expression is a lot more gentle than usual. As a family member who relies on me, she can only reveal such a look.

"Chifuyu-nee."

"Hm? What is it?"

"Nothing, well...sorry for making you worried."

Surprised by my words, Chifuyu-nee smiles.

"I'm not worried about you, as you wouldn't die that easily. Besides, you're my younger brother."

That's a strange type of trust you have. However, I know that this is Chifuyu-nee's way of hiding her awkwardness, so I'm not really bothered by it.

"Then, I got other things to settle. I'm going back to work. You can go back to your room once you finish resting."

Chifuyu-nee merely said this as she quickly walked out of the infirmary. She's really someone who's serious at work; that is the ideal adult to me.

"Ah--ahem, ahem!"

Seems like somebody just brushed past Chifuyu-nee... or should I say, the one who deliberately coughed must be Houki. Can't be wrong here.

Shua! She pulled the curtain aside with both hands. The half-opened curtain is now opened completely by Houki...eh, there's no need to open it completely!

"Yo, Houki."

"Hm, nn."

The childhood friend with a ponytail straightens herself as she snorts.

What should I say? She's not angry, but she's definitely not in a good mood.

"Th-That, well, as for the battle today..."

"Hm? Speaking of which, how was the match? It didn't count, right?"

"Ah, ahhh, that's to be expected, since a lot of things happened."

That's true, but when will the next match occur? I would be really grateful if it could be held after I recover.

"Wh-What were you thinking!?"

"Huh?"

I suddenly got scolded. What is she angry about? Is she really angry? It looks like she's acting angry to hide some other emotions."

"I told you to win...but you could have left it to the teachers, right? Haven't you heard of 'overconfidence will lead to self-destruction'?"

"Ah, so I won?"

"Stop talking about winning!"

What's with her?

Houki's panting as her shoulders continue to tremble. Why are you so angry--ah!

"Were you worried about me?"

"Of, of course not! Who would be worried about you?"

You weren't...at least worry about me a bit! You're my childhood friend after all!

"An-anyway! You're grateful for the training you had, right!? We will continue with it, you got it!?"

"Ah--okay, okay, I got it."

"Good that you know...I'm heading back to the room."

Not waiting for me? What a cold childhood friend.

"...Ichika."

"Hm?"

"That, during the battle...you were, were, were..."

Funny?...Or something like that?

"Cool...no-nothing!"

I couldn't hear the front part clearly, but since she said that it's nothing, it should be nothing, right? I'll just treat it as nothing!

"Okay then."

Houki briskly walked out of the room as if she was escaping. Whatever the case, please remember to close the door! Also, if possible, I really hope that she can pull the curtains up for me!

"Hooo...I really want to sleep..."

I got dragged into a deep slumber, probably out of fatigue. Without any resistance, I just sleep comfortably on the bed.

"..."

Hm? What is it? Seems like someone's breathing on me , and the persons seems close. Who is it? Speaking of which, how long did I sleep? What time is it?

"Ichika..."

"Rin?"

"Uu?"

I know the voice belonged to Rin, but I was shocked when I opened my eyes--Rin's face is 3cm away from my face.

"...What are you doing?"

"Yo-you-you'r-you're awake?"

"I got woken up by your voice. Why so frantic all of a sudden?"

"I-I'm not panicking! Stop uttering rubbish, idiot!"

Is this person really the kind who would end a sentence with 'idiot' as a verbal tic? It's somewhat too much to say that so many times! A peculiar role that fails won't have a good end!"

"Ah--that's right, I heard the match was null!"

"Of course!"

Sitting beside me on the bed, will Rin peel an apple for me? Though I don't see an apple...

"Ah!"

"Wh-what?"

"What was the result!? We haven't got the rematch, confirmed, right?"

"It doesn't matter!"

"Huh? Why?"

"Anyway, it doesn't matter!"

Such a ridiculous reason. But since she said so, I'll just listen to her! But that matter is that matter, men have to be partial.

"Rin."

"What?"

"That...well, I'm sorry, for a lot of things...sorry."

I honestly lowered my head in apology. No matter what happened, nor what happens, once I realize that I did something wrong, I have to apologize.

Seeing me like this, Rin reveals a shocked expression before recovering.

"I was too agitated at that time...it's not a problem now !"

Seems like she voluntarily forgave me. Even the most intimate friends have to abide the rules, as I don't want to lose the bonds I have with others.

"Ah, I remembered."

For some reason, the promise I had with Rin suddenly awoke within me. If I was right, we were in grade 6. The place was the classroom, and like now, it was at sunset.

"More accurately, it was 'if my cooking gets better, you'll eat my sweet and sour pork everyday, right'? Or something like that? How is it? Did your cooking improve?"

"Huh? Ah, erm..."

Rin seems to be at a loss of words as she looks around and nods her head. Is it my imagination? her face seems really red.

"Even though I just thought of it, that promise doesn't have any other meaning, right? I always thought that you would treat me to free--"

"Tha-That's right! You remembered correctly! If, if I let others eat what I cook, wouldn't my cooking improve? So ...that, that's right!"

Rin suddenly rattled off like a machine gun. I feel like I got nearly overpowered by her momentum.

"I see. Sigh, I thought it would be some promise like ' drinking miso soup everyday~!' Good that it's not, seems like I thought too much.

"..."

"Rin?"

"Huh, that, that's right! You thought too much! Ah ha, ahhahahaha!"

Laughing out in a ridiculous manner, Rin seems like she's trying to hide something. But if she's deliberately trying to hide it, there's no need to go after it!

Speaking of which, there's still something I'm concerned about,

"Are you going to reopen the shop? Your dad's cooking great, I still want more!"

"Ah...that, the shop...won't be opened again."

"Huh? Why?"

"Because my parents divorced..."

...What? I thought they were a lovely couple? What happened?

But it seems like this isn't a joke. Seeing Rin's face look so empty, I'm hesitating on what I should say.

"That was the reason why I returned to China."

"I see..."

Now that I remember, at that time, Rin's emotions were unstable. Back then, it seemed like she wanted to hide something as she often acted cheery. I always felt that it was weird.

"Basically, my mom got my custody. Right now, in whatever aspects, females are superior, and they get treated better, so..."

I thought that she would try to assure me, but her tone deepens.

"It's been a year since I last saw dad. I suppose he should still be energetic!"

I don't know what to say to Rin, the fact that Rin's parents divorced left a deep impact on me.

It's definitely a bad thing for a family to break up, but something must have happened to cause them to break up!

I recall that easy-going uncle and the energetic aunty.

Why--why did it end up like that?

But I can't ask Rin, because she's even more hurt than anybody else.

"Each family has their own skeleton in the closet."

I...don't know what sort of people my parents were. To me, who only has Chifuyu-nee as family, I really can't embrace the feelings in Rin's words.

"That...Rin."

"Hm? What is it?"

"Where are we going out to next time?"

"Wha? Does this mean, a da--"

"I'll get Gotanda over. We haven't met together for a long time."

"..."

"I'm not going."

Rin puffs her cheeks as she said this. What! I just invited you! You really don't know the value of being a friend!

"If, if it's just both of you going, if I had to accompany you, it'--"

BAM!, the infirmary door got slammed open.

"Ichika-san, how's your body? I'm here to nurs--ah!?"

Striding in, Cecilia stopped the moment she saw Rin at the bed.

"Why are you...? Ichika's from class 1, there's no need to be visited by someone from class 2, right?"

"What are you saying? It's alright since I'm his childhood friend! You're just a real outsider!"

"I-I'm a classmate, so it's alright! And I'm now Ichika-san's *special* coach!"

She just emphasized on the 'special'. However, the moment Cecilia said that 'because I'm a representative candidate', she just dug her own grave.

"Then I'll be his special coach from tomorrow onwards, I'm a representative candidate as well."

"That, that won't do?"

"Why? Is there any reason? Ichika agrees, right?"

"No, no you can't! Right, Ichika-san!?"

Why do you ask me? To be honest, I'm fine with anyone, as long as I'm taught about IS...ah, Rin should be better, right? She's a mixed long/close ranged fighter, but she's of the same energy type as me.

"Rin is definitely more suitable."

"Wha...?"

"Humph, isn't that right?"

"Because we're both power types"

"..."

"..."

That's strange? Why did they just widen their eyes? There shouldn't be any other special reason, right?

"That's right! It's *just* that you're both power-types, right? However, don't worry! Even if I, Cecilia Alcott, am a mid-ranged type, I'll be an excellent special coach for Ichika-san!"

And just now she emphasized on the 'just'.

Is this what made Rin feel bad? On first glance, she seems angry. Or rather, she's glaring at me. Eh? Am I the problem here?"

"Okay, let's analyze the battle today! Just you and me."

"What are you saying! Ichika fought together with me, of course he has to analyze it with me! Are you an idiot!? "

"Id...? Humph, because of that, classless people can really be troublesome."

"At least they're better than pretentious people."

"What did you say!?"

"What?"

Ah, these two people's personalities really don't match. ..or I should say, doesn't Cecilia want to be at least a bit friendlier to Houki or Rin--even if I say that, it's because she didn't that this happened!

(Ahh, really...I just want to go back to my room and sleep...or I should say, I want to take a shower...)

They completely ignore my troubles. Right between the two of them who're quarreling loudly, I sighed.

50m below the school grounds is a secret place that only people with level 4 authority can enter.

The IS that stopped functioning was immediately transported there. In those two hours, Chifuyu continued to rewatch videos of that battle.

"..."

The lights in the room are off,. and Chifuyu's face, which was lit by the screen lights, looks extremely cold.

"Orimura-sensei?"

A pop-up suddenly appears on the screen. The image that appears on the pop-up shows Maya, who's holding a flatscreen computer.

"You may enter."

After being allowed in, when the door opened, Maya moves in with much more vigor than usual.

"The IS analysis is complete."

"Ah, so how is it?"

"Yes, it's--an unmanned drone."

There are IS technology that the world is still developing, and either or both these technology--remote control, stand-alone movements were used to commanding this. This is a fact that all the people related to the Academy were ordered to keep quiet.

"We don't know how it was operated. The core was burned by Orimura-kun's last attack, and it's unlikely that we can repair it."

"The core?"

"...It's not registered."

"Is that so?"

Chifuyu then mutters 'as expected'. Seeing her declare this with a confident attitude, Maya reveals a surprised look.

"Have you thought of something?"

"No, nothing. Nothing--yet."

Saying this, Chifuyu turns to look at the image on the screen again.

That's not an expression of a teacher, but more like a warrior. That expression would make one think of the ' legendary pilot' who once stood at the top of the world; however, those sharp eyes of Chifuyu are merely staring at the image on the screen.

"You're too slow!"

This is the first thing I heard the moment I returned to the room. Is this childhood friend of mine the devil?

"What the heck were you doing? Really...I waited for you with a hungry stomach!"

"Waited for me--huh, what? You haven't had dinner yet?"

"I TOLD YOU I WAS WAITING FOR YOU!"

No, you could have gone first...even though I really want to say it, I didn't most likely because it would anger Houki! Hm, I am learning after all!

"Then let's go to the cafeteria then! It's about time they close down."

"Hol-Hold on!"

Houki stops me just as I'm going out. What's going on? There's already no time, is there really something important? On a side note, the cafeteria closes at 8, we can't even get anchovies after that time.

"To-Today, is, that...erm..."

"Hm? Do I smell food?"

And it seems like it was just cooked. Right now, my sense of smell is 20% stronger, 'cause I have an empty stomach.

"There seems to be something on the table...ohh? Isn't that fried rice? What's going on?"

There's a magical smell to it. It's the smell of being fried with sesame oil. This smell can induce my appetite.

"I-I...cooked it."

"What? Really?"

"Why do you look so surprised?"

No, well, it's surprising...

But the fact that it's not Japanese cuisine makes me even more surprised. What's the wind blowing today!? Is she going to demand money from me? Don't worry, I don't have any money with me.

"Ar-Are you going to eat or not; which will it be?"

"Well, I'll eat, but...why are you angry?"

"I-I'm not!"

She sounded angry, but seems like she's not. Since she said this, she shouldn't be angry, right? To trust before suspecting, this is the basis of building a human relationship.

"Anyway, can I eat?"

"Wash your hands first. Also, rinse your mouth, too."

As expected of Houki, she's really someone who emphasizes on the customs. Though I can't just brush it off as common knowledge, since people of all ages with lack of common sense are increasing in numbers, it's nothing much to mention it as a common knowledge.

As this is something I will normally do even when not being told, it won't take too long, and I quickly finished it .

The moment I walked out of the bathroom, Houki's already at the table telling me to sit down. I quietly sit down and palm my hands together in thanks.

"Well then, itadakimasu."

"Hm, help yourself. Eat as much as you want."

I start to gulp it down.

"..."

"How is it? Is it good?"

Houki looks delighted, but I haven't given out a definitive answer.

"It's...bland."

Houki snatched the ceramic spoon away from me and takes a large bite out of it.

"...It's bland."

"Isn't it?"

From the appearance...it's just ordinary fried rice, but I couldn't taste the flavor. Why is that so? Most likely, there's not enough flavorings--no, she probably did not add in any condiments at all. If so, I'm amazed that she could actually cook it to such a color. Is the slightly charred brown that increases the appetite a form of magic?

"This, this is just an accident...that's right! Usually, I would never forget to add it!"

"No, forgetting to put in seasonings isn't something that should happen often."

"You're too noisy! If you don't want it, I'll just eat it all!"

"I never said that! Here, give me the spoon."

I grabbed the spoon from the angry Houki and started to wolf down the fried rice. Even if it was bland and I couldn't enjoy it, I still carefully chewed it before swallowing.

Even if it's bland, I still have to be thankful to the person who cooked this personally. I can't be called a man if I leave leftovers!

"Thanks for the meal."

After polishing off the rice, I put down the spoon and brought the palms of my hands together in thanks.

"..."

"Wha-What?"

Houki wordlessly stares at me as she reveals a hard to describe expression--one of the many emotions, but not really of it.

"Don-Don't be mistaken!"

"What?"

"Today, that, was...just an accident, a really seldom moment in which I failed. Normally, I'm successful!"

Is that so? I don't really know, but at least I can trust her...however, this seems to be the first time I've seen Houki cook. But then again, the last time we met was in 4th grade, so it isn't that weird.

"But why Chinese cuisines? Aren't you more skilled in Japanese cuisine?"

"The, the way of the cuisines isn't divided by countries, I just want to prove that."

But since you failed, in the end you couldn't, right!? This is a dish that doesn't even have a nationality!

"Bu-But, no matter what, if you're unhappy with it, I can still cook it instead of you."

"YOU, YOU DON'T WANT TO EAT WHAT I COOK FOR YOU!?"

"No, I never said that...what's with you? You've been acting strange so far!"

"...I said that I wanted to cook for you every day..."

What happened to the roaring voice? Houki just curled back suddenly and moved her mouth softly. Of course, I can't hear what she's saying.

"I-It's all your fault! You made a promise with someone, how do you intend to settle it?"

"The promise...is it about Rin? I settled that already!"

"Wh-What...?"

"I said 'I settled that' already. I apologized to her, and she forgave me."

"..."

Why are you looking so suspicious, am I not trustworthy?

"That's not something that can be settled with an apology!"

"Didn't I say that it's settled already!?"

Why is this person so obstinate? How ridiculous!

"Besides, when can a lifetime vow be settled that easi--"

The angry machine gun-like voice of Houki got drained out by the casual opening of the door

"Are Shinonono-san and Orimura-kun in?"

This slow response comes from Yamada-sensei, as she forcefully opens the door. See! It's her.

"What's wrong, sensei?"

"Oh, you have to change rooms."

"What?"

Change rooms? Yamada-sensei? This room is a two-persons room!

"...Sensei, please tell us what's going on."

"Ye-Yes! Sorry!"

The sharp gaze from Houki causes Yamada-sensei to shrink away like a small animal. Really, stop bullying her , she's a teacher!

"Well, the one changing rooms is Shinonono-san. The rooms are finally arranged, so you two don't have to live together from today onwards."

No need to live together--oh, Yamada-sensei's pretty capable.

"Ichika!"

"Oh, ohh!"

Found out again! Why, just why?

"I'll help out as well. Hurry up and get ready!"

"Wa-Wai-Wait a minute, do I have to move out now?"

Houki just said something unbelievable, and Yamada-sensei blinks in surprise, probably not expecting that.

"That...that's true. There would be many problems if a boy and a girl live together in the same room. Besides, Shinonono-san, you haven't been able to relax, right?"

"No, that, I--"

Houki continues to stutter as she glances at me--ahh, I see! So that's the reason.

"No need to be bothered. Don't worry, I will obediently wake up and brush my teeth even without Houki around."

"--!"

PA!...huh, that's strange? I seem to hear something weird, like someone going crazy or something...

"SENSEI, I'M MOVING OUT NOW!!"

"O-Okay! Then let's start!"

As Houki prompted her, Yamada-sensei's body trembles again

"Can I help out?"

"NO NEED!"

Wah, she's really angry, just like a katana that will slice on touch. Seems like I'd better shut up first.

"...I was so worried about you, and yet you..."

She muttered as if anger's mixed into it, but that's just it. As expected of Houki, the packing is done in less than an hour.

"Umm..."

Now that my co-habitant is suddenly gone, the room seems to feel like it's twice as large.

Speaking of which, it's really lonely to be alone.

If possible, I really want to take a bath. However, the sad thing is that they're still adjusting the guy/girls time schedule--I remember Yamada-sensei's face when she said that she will try to settle this during this month.

(But about that...because of IS, I reunited with Houki and Rin, and met Cecilia...that's unbelievable.)

People normally say that 'the fate between people is inexplicable', and truthfully, it's even more fantasical as compared to a novel, and light novels have more graphical than novels--I won't continue on, that's too overboard.

"...Let's sleep!"

I took my shower, brushed my teeth and wore my sleeping clothes. On a side note, my indoor clothes are my sleeping clothes. Okay, let's sleep!

THOMP *THOMP!*

WAH! Whose fist is it now! I immediately lept out of my bed and dashed towards the door.

"Yes, may I know who--"

"..."

The one standing in front of the door with an unhappy face is Houki.

"What is it? Did you forget something?"

"..."

Houki didn't answer me. She continues to look unhappy, as if she's a time bomb with unknown danger rating and has 5 minutes left...well, I haven't watched those kinds of things.

"What happened? Enter the room first!"

"No need, I'll just stay here."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"..."

"..."

Oi!

"...Houki, if there's nothing to say, I'm going to bed."

"OF, OF COURSE THERE'S SOMETHING!"

Houki just shouted out, scaring me. You'll get scolded if you shout that loud on the corridor--by the devil-like dorm supervisor.

"Ne-Next month, in the individual division tournament..."

That tournament should be held in June, and it seems different from the class representative tournament; it's a free-for-all individual tournament. Except for the fact that the applicants are sorted by the year of the student, there isn't really that many special conditions. However, the fact that a personal IS has an overwhelming advantage hasn't changed.

"If, if I win--"

Houki blushes as she continues. For some reason, she seems to be blushing as she looks at me.

"You-You'll go out with me!"[1D 2]

Houki emphatically points at me.

"...What?"

Of course, as of now, I am a bit puzzled, but this seems to be a declaration of war. Now, if I only I could know who this declaration is targeted at--

Afterwords

Hello to everyone. We met for the first time, my name is Yumizuru Izuru.

This IS novel is the first original light novel that I personally wrote. How is it? I'll be really grateful if the readers can give me some feedback.

I'm really thankful to be able to write this story in such a manner for all the readers to read.

First, I'll like to thank my first reader, and the most important person to me who has been supporting me, the chief editor, Misaka-san, who gave me this opportunity, my editor, Shoji-san, who worked with me all the way since the planning stage, and Okuira-san, who gave life to the characters. Thank you all.

Also, to all the readers who have this book right now, I really want to thank you now for reading my work.

It's because of everyone supporting me that I am here now.

Then, let's talk about the story! Because of a certain encounter. In my life, there has to be robots involved in

my line of work; is this fate? When I started off, I was writing as a scriptwriter at a company for 5 years (about the number of pages of a carton of paper), and what I produced also involved robots. (At that time, it seemed to cause quite a stir about someone ridiculous who sent a large pile of paper over)

But every time I recall this, I will always think that it's amazing that they could finish such a novel that's excessively long! One of my readers later became my superior. It's thanks to him favoring me that I am able to be here today. Truly another story that makes me grateful for.

Because I met so many people, I was able to get a proper footing. This is really a great environment. Thank you all.

Just like that, the lead of this hi-speed school life action love comedy 'IS'--Ichika will continue to interact with other characters, support each other and continue to be active! Probably...no, that'll definitely happen!

Speaking of which, even though I switched from a gaming company to light novels, being raised in the gaming world, I still like to work with multiple people

giving me ideas. It's really interesting to be working with people while discussing.

It's the same when I got Okiura-san to help out with the illustrations. Even though I only told him during the discussion not to hold back when giving ideas, the moment I said this, he pulled out a brilliant thumbnail for the IS! The power an illustrator holds always has an overwhelming presence, and I'm really amazed by that.

Normally speaking, the story will be completed first, but it's pretty common to see some creative illustrations while writing the story. The illustrations really stimulates me a lot.

"This illustration concept is great! Okay, let's show it here! Then the design should be like this, like that...ohhh, that concept can be used later! Very good, we have a blueprint for the next novel!"

And things like that—the moment my thoughts are visualized by the illustrator's hands, I will think 'amazing ! The concept image is formed! It's not just a thought!' and feel really happy about it.

Also, if he's an illustrator you like, I'll be even more grateful!

At this moment, I really feel like I'll living in a good time in a good country (laughs).

I hope that everyone can work hard with me for the time being.

Please take care of me. If you can give me your thoughts, it will be a great encouragement to me.

Even if it's just a 'clap', I'll be really happy (uu, I've been requesting others now...)

Then, let's meet in the 2nd volume! See you next time!

--Yumizuru Izuru

A certain day in April, 2009.

Congratulations to Yumizuru-san for publishing the first novel.

We've met for the first time. I'm Okiura, the one in charge of the illustrations.

Anyway, Houki's prideful bad temper is really cute.

At the same time, I'm really jealous of Ichika's harem (laughs).

Yumizuru bro, S-san, who's in charge of editing, thank you for giving someone like me a personal space to express myself.

And I would also like to thank the designers for their perfect layouts.

-Okuira

弓弦先生、
祝1巻
オメデトウゴザイマス

okiura

はじめまして。
挿絵を描かせていただきました
okiuraと言います。

とにかく、箒のツンツンぶりが可愛いです。
それと同時に一夏のハーレムぶりに嫉妬です(笑

弓弦先生、担当のSさん
自分の様な者に、このような場を
与えてくださり、大変感謝してます。

デザイナー様もカッコよく仕上げてくださり
ありがとうございます。

Translation Notes and References

Chapter 2

1. ↑ 白, "White Expressions"
2. ↑ 雪 "Yukihira type2"
3. ↑ Many make a mistake here, Yukihira and Yukihira Nigata are two different weapons where Nigata means *type2* (ie: an upgraded version).
4. ↑ A kesagiri is a strike from lower-left to upper-right, so in this case, a reverse kesagiri would be from lower-right to upper-left.
5. ↑ The first kanji in Ichika's name means "one".
6. ↑ A pun here. Dreadful (凄, *sugo*mi) and dejected (す, *sugo* sugo), which is why Ichika found it interesting.

Chapter 3

1. ↑ Orimura-kun is hinting at the famous actor Takakura Ken, who is known for being rather quite. "I don't really talk a lot." is a phrase he's famous for.

Chapter 4

1. ↑ The ASIMO is a humanoid robot made by Honda Motors.
2. ↑ The words Houki used can both be used to ask someone out for a date or to ask another to accompany the speaker on an errand.